



LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

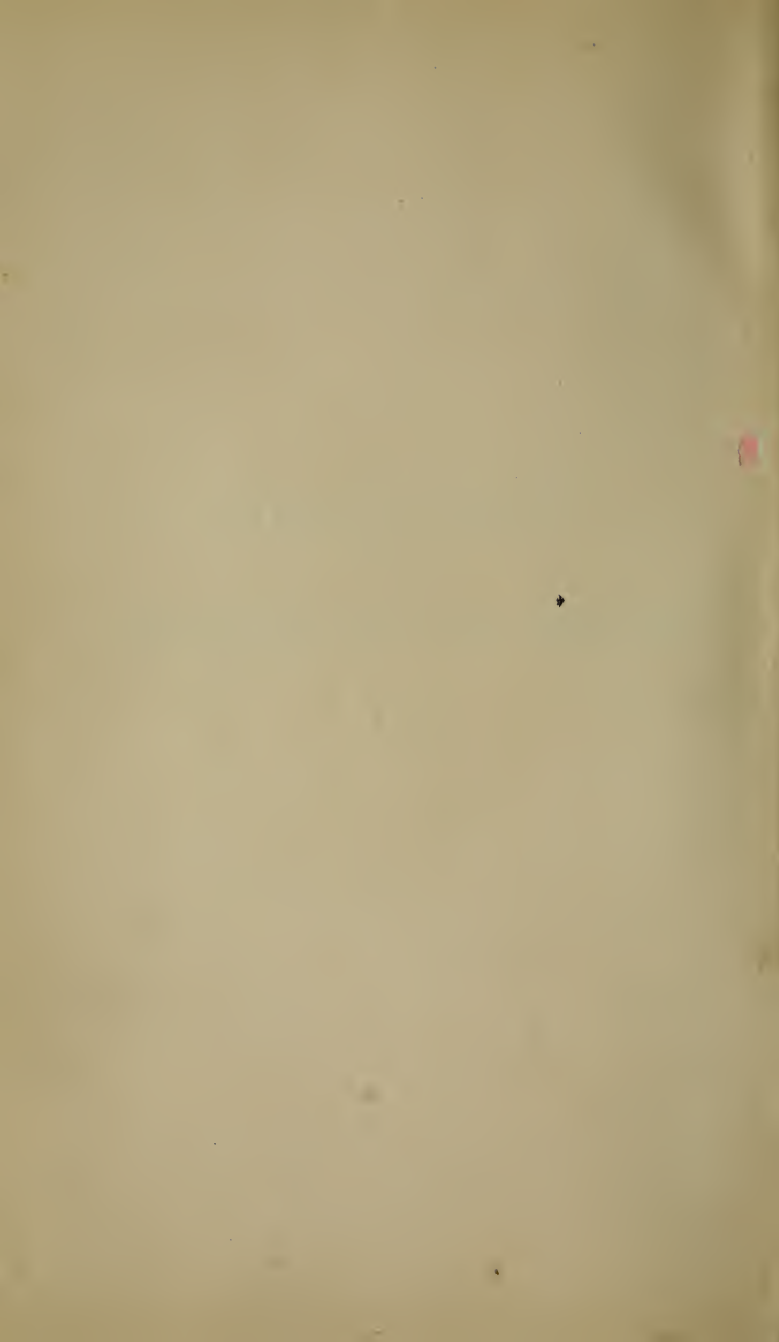
823
H28th
v.1

THREE RECRUITS

AND

THE GIRLS THEY LEFT BEHIND THEM.

VOL. I.



THREE RECRUITS

AND

THE GIRLS THEY LEFT BEHIND THEM

A Novel

BY

JOSEPH HATTON

AUTHOR OF

“CLYTIE,” “CRUEL LONDON,” “THE QUEEN OF BOHEMIA,”
&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,

13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1880.

All rights reserved.

LONDON :
PRINTED BY DUNCAN MACDONALD, BLENHEIM HOUSE,
BLENHEIM STREET, OXFORD STREET.

823
H28th
v. 1

TO

JOSEPH COWEN, M.P.

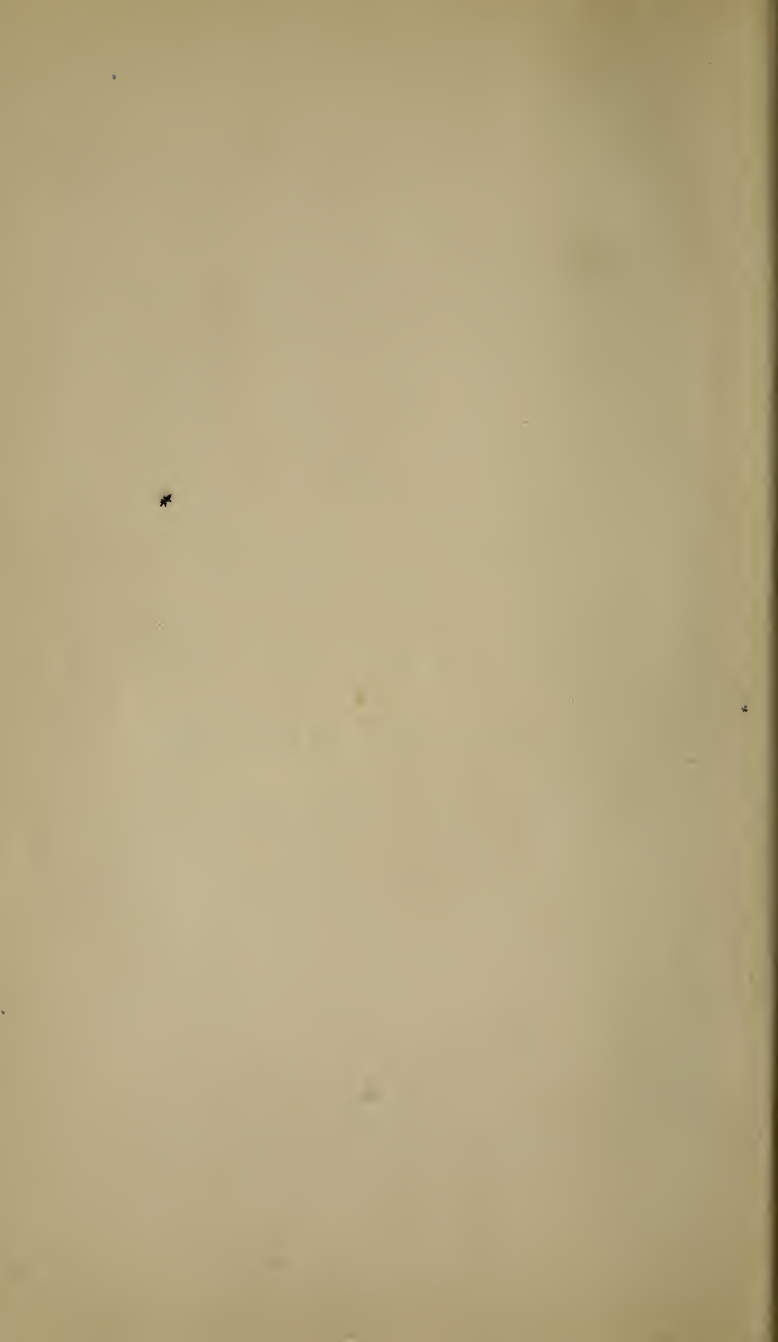
THESE PAGES

ARE DEDICATED

AS A SLIGHT TRIBUTE OF ADMIRATION

AND REGARD.

Genes Ray 3 Nov 56 mortlake:30



BOOK I.

ENLISTED BY CUPID.

O'er crackling ice, and depths profound,
With nimble glide the skaters play ;
O'er treacherous Pleasure's flowery ground
They lightly skim and haste away.

JOHNSON.



THREE RECRUITS.

CHAPTER I.

THE OLDEST AND THE NEWEST FASHION.

But there's nothing half so sweet in life
As love's young dream :
No, there's nothing half so sweet in life
As love's young dream.

MOORE.

IT was years and years ago in an old Midland town ; though it might have been to-day, judging from the topic they were discussing at the Angel Inn, while the London mail was dashing along the Northern road.

Bad times. All the ports of the world closed against English commerce. Ministers denounced and defended. The nation without allies. Everything and everybody going to the dogs, except those who had already gone. Such were the themes of the local politicians who smoked their pipes and emptied foaming beakers of strong ale at the principal hotel, waiting to see the coach come in and hear the news from town.

It was I said years and years ago. Before railways. Not before Love. That is as old as Hate, or how should we keep a check on villainy? It was in the good old days of rural simplicity, mail coaches, port wine, and tie-wigs; in the bad old days of trade riots, civil strife, religious persecutions, and hanging for robbery. There were time-serving politicians then as now, and hard, cruel, bitter bad times un-

tempered by a well-informed Public Opinion.

Let it encourage hopefulness in us who live in the present days of commercial distress, when we think of those same hard, bitter times which some of the veterans who are smoking their last pipes at the Angel still, remember, if not from actual experience, through the conversation of their fathers. We were fighting the world. One ally stood by us ; the romantic King of Sweden. Otherwise the universe may be said to have been opposed to us. Our commerce was attacked in a conspiracy against which we issued retaliatory orders in council that hurt some of our manufacturers as much as did the enemy's own measures. Heavily taxed, with dear bread, sustaining disasters abroad and disturbances at home, harassed by trade disputes, divided counsels, monetary difficulties,

currency complications, afflicted with bad harvests, nothing but the innate luck and courage of this bull-dog race held the country together. Hand labour was fighting against machinery, agricultural hirelings were dragging out a miserable existence on the scantiest fare, landlords were demanding payments of their rents in gold, and Napoleon Bonaparte with his continental allies had sworn to crush us beyond the possibility of resurrection.

Yet we are here to-day to talk of these things, standing upon a greater height of solid power than ever Rome herself looked down from. It is true our industries are under a cloud, and will be until Governments are free to look the cause in the face; but to-day is summer weather compared with the hard, bitter times the people were talking about at the Angel, in the very earliest days of the wonderful

century, when this veritable history begins.

These things did not, however, at present greatly concern Susan Hardwick. So long as they are fed and clothed, neither war nor bad trade will trouble young people much; and Love leads an enchanted existence. Nay, it flourishes most in dark days. English officers who upheld the national honour in their gallant deaths at Isandula wore love trinkets and died with their ladies' names on their lips, just as their fathers did in the continental wars, when Susan Hardwick was toying with the all-conquering god.

It is an old, old fashion, this Love, a pleasant pain you cannot avoid if you would, a strange trouble you would not put aside if you could. People are afflicted with it in various ways. With some it takes the form of melancholy. Others find in it a transcendent delight. When

it is crossed by disappointment the complaint has in it the seeds of woes innumerable. A gentle nature under the blight of unrequited love may become misanthropical. But an arrogant and revengeful spirit is often stirred to desperate deeds when outdone by successful rivalry for the heart of the girl it loves.

If you would study this philosophy of love in a philosophical way you will turn to dear old Burton's famous work. Should you be inclined to consider the passion as it was developed in the histories of a trinity of fair women who belong to this chronicle of Chesterfield, with all its attendant incidents of romance and mystery, of joy and pain, of broken vows and ruined hopes, of sorrows unexpected and sudden happiness, then you will let Burton rest on his shelf and follow these strange adventures, for strange indeed they are, the more so

that they are founded in sober truth and honesty.

The story of Susan Hardwick, only daughter of William Rutland Hardwick, Esq., millowner and magistrate, of the Hall, is not one of the least romantic in the histories of our county families. What a tantalising picture of young womanhood it was, this English daughter of Eve, sitting in the shadow of a pair of tall elms that sprung like two sculptured shafts out of the green turf in front of her proud father's house on the outskirts of the town.

She was watching the gambols of a kitten playing with a ball of cotton that had fallen from some needlework in her lap. "The old straight waistcoats of whalebone," as an art-satirist describes the corset of a previous period, had fallen into disuse, and had for a time been succeeded

by the easy, graceful fashion of low-necked, baby-waisted dresses and long mittens. Susan's skirts fell in soft folds about her, and there was poetry in the very twinkle of her pretty feet. The kitten playing with that ball of yellow thread somehow struck Oliver North as affinitive to his own position, as he paused in descending the half-a-dozen circular stone steps that led from the old Queen Anne house known by the high-sounding title already mentioned.

Not that Oliver had defined the idea in his own mind, but he loved Susan, and could never quite make out whether he had obtained any return of his passion. That was Susan's secret.

"Is that you?" she asked presently, without looking round, for the shadow of a youthful figure, in square cut coat and breeches, fell upon the green sward before her.

"Yes," said Oliver, a blond, broad-shouldered, frank-eyed young fellow. "I beg your pardon, I came to see Mr. Hardwick."

"And you are disappointed to find only his daughter at home?"

It was this gift of repartee that puzzled and sometimes depressed Oliver. He was not skilled in reading the heart; and Susan's cleverness jarred upon him.

"I had important business with your father, but I am very glad to see you, Susan; you know how glad."

He stood looking at her, his grey eyes full of admiration.

"What were you thinking of while you stood looking at me on the steps?" she asked, turning towards him a sunny, mischievous face, with dark eyes and red parted lips.

"I never quite know what I am think-

ing of when I see you, my thoughts are in such a jumble."

"Oh, I'm sorry," she said, kicking the cotton ball with her high-heeled shoe and relapsing into her former attitude.

"Yes, I think I do know what I had in my mind; I thought that was my heart at your feet."

"And that I and the kitten were playing with it," she rejoined; "thank you, Mr. North."

"I did not mean it unkindly; but, when I am clear about what I think, I have a habit of letting it out, and I am a little out of sorts to-day."

"I should have thought to find you in spirits, as your old friend is expected by the coach to-night from London."

"I don't think," said the young man sitting by Susan's side, but at a respectful distance, "Philip Scruton was ever a par-

ticular friend of mine. We were companions in a way; though I could never trust him, and he never really liked me. But what a hero he will be at Chesterfield!"

"A hero! a vagabond, Lord Ellerbie calls him. I heard him telling my father that he will come to no good."

"I don't suppose his foreign education has much improved him."

"Education! It is quite shocking to hear what Lord Ellerbie calls it. He says he has lived with bandits and robbers, that he has been a spy in the service of Spain, that he has been in the pay of Pitt; and, indeed, the old lord seems very sorry he has escaped to come back to England."

"That *is* a character to have! Perhaps Lord Ellerbie is not quite just. Though I cannot remember anything good of Philip, I don't remember anything very bad."

"Boys are not particularly good, I

believe, as a rule," said Susan, who had a deal of worldly wisdom for a girl; "you never know what they will be until they have really proved themselves as men."

"Indeed! My experience does not enable me to judge," said Oliver, smiling.

"No!" answered Susan, kicking the silken ball with her pretty foot.

"When I knew Phil, my father was alive, and we were well off, as the saying is. I was at school, and so was Philip; I had a pony, and so had he. Since then my fortunes have gone back and his have advanced. The man who stood between him and the title and estates of Ellerbie is dead. Times are changed. We shall have to call him the Honourable Philip Scruton now, I suppose."

"The *dishonourable* Philip Scruton is what his uncle calls him," Susan replied, laughing.

“Well,” said a hard, firm voice, as a thin, wiry man walked slowly from the house, “what is it, North?”

Susan and Oliver rose as Mr. Hardwick spoke. The old man had not changed his habit of dress for years. He still wore the old tie-wig, buckled shoes, brown stuff coat, with brass buttons, which had been the costume of his father. He walked with a crutch-stick. His face was closely shaven. It was a keen, cold face, with thin lips, and square chin. His eyes were shifting, and looked anxious.

“What is it, North? You may speak before Susan; she will have to get accustomed to bad news.”

Susan had gathered up her work and was going into the house. She paused at a word from her father.

“I fear there is some real danger at the mill,” said Oliver, timidly, evidently not

wishing to speak of it before Miss Hardwick.

“Well? go on; my daughter may hear what it is.”

“Don’t mind me, Mr. North,” said Susan, calmly.

“The hands say they won’t let the new frames come in, and I find the little machine of my own which they had allowed to be used is again broken.”

Oliver did not add that upon the pieces was a notice written in red characters, telling him his life would be forfeited if any further attempts were made to reduce the hand-labour of the mill by any more new mechanism.

“Ah, I expected your genius for invention would get me into trouble,” said Mr. Hardwick.

“But you encouraged Mr. North in his work,” said Miss Hardwick, looking at her

father, whose eyes fell under her steady gaze.

“Yes, yes, I know, his ideas were excellent; well, well, to cut a long story short, what have we to fear?—speak out, man.”

“We may not use the new machines, and we must re-employ the old hands, or the mill is to be burnt as others have been.”

Mr. Hardwick looked at his daughter. He had a great scheme in his mind which related to her, or he would not have wished her to hear Mr. North’s message.

“That means ruin!” he exclaimed, “do you hear, Susan? It is time you gave up kittens and frivolity to learn that you are now a woman.”

“If I were a man,” she said, “I would go down to the mill and see if they would burn it! Not that it would matter much, for it has always brought misery to us.

My mother died through the worries of that mill. It is on your mind day and night. I don't see the good of it, if you will have me speak as if I were a woman, and what I say is worth hearing. But they shouldn't burn it, the wretches! If it is to be burnt, I would burn it myself!"

Now, who would have thought a pretty, gentle maiden, entering upon her first dream of love, playing in the sun with a kitten, could have turned upon her father so sharply? The old man looked at Oliver and then at his daughter, who gathered her trailing dress about her and went into the house. They did not see that, when she reached her own room, she buried her face in her hands and burst into tears. Mary Kirk saw her, for Mary had been sitting in the little ante-room reading a letter which the postman had brought from Grassmoor Farm only within

the hour. It was an epistle of great moment to Mary, but she laid it by and hurried to embrace and comfort her friend. The clouds were of short duration. Susan presently looked up between the showers, and smiled like a spring day.

"What is the matter?" asked Mary, lovingly twining her white round arms about the slim figure of her friend.

"Only my ill-temper, Mary; I am the matter, nobody else; I am always at the point of rebellion, and I break down the moment I give my own signals of revolt."

"You always were odd," said Mary, looking at the other with a wondering face, "but education does that. I never was educated except just in reading, writing, and arithmetic."

"Your good heart is the best education, Mary, and away in that little village of yours everything is pure, and sweet, and

Arcadian ; you don't know what it is to live in a town and be irritated about what my father calls ways and means, and political economy."

"Oh, but we all have our troubles, and Grassmoor has plenty, I can tell you, including highway robberies, and ghosts, and things."

"You only say that to comfort me. I can tell just as well as if I were at the back of your thoughts. There, now, don't deny it. I will wipe my eyes and wash my face, and then we will have a good talk, here where we can't be disturbed by Oliver North and his pleasant messages, or by father and his financial theories, which all come to the ground in practice."

Mary Kirk, who did not understand what her friend meant by financial theories, sat down upon a low hassock by the window, and watched the town girl with

admiration and wonder. For Chesterfield was a great busy town compared with Grassmoor, where Mary lived in a low-ceilinged rambling old house called the Home Farm, and walked two miles to church on Sundays. She was a dove-like girl, Mary; she had brown wavy hair, and dark violet-blue eyes. Her dress was something like what we now call Dolly Varden, and, estimating simply the rural character of the name, she might have been a real Dolly Varden herself. She was a picture of health. Her eyes were bright—they danced with a natural gaiety. Her lips were red always without artifice, and they parted on white teeth, just sufficiently irregular to make you wonder whether she would have been more beautiful had they been quite perfect.

Mary Kirk was what nature had made her. Susan Hardwick was the result of a

combination of nature and art. Just as her dainty clocked hose were more artistic than Mary's blue knitted stockings, so were her manners more refined, her thoughts sharper, her wit brighter, and her ambition keener. In good truth, Mary Kirk had no ambition at the moment beyond that of having the prettiest wedding that Grassmoor had ever seen. The greatest difficulty to the realization of this wish was not what her neighbours said, that she could not make up her mind whether to accept Jacob Marks or Tom Bertram, but how to tell the latter that Jacob Marks was her choice.

When the young town lady had dried her eyes and washed her face, this was the subject they fell to discussing. There was supposed to be an exchange of confidences between the two, but the exchange was

like English free trade, all on one side. Mary Kirk told everything, and Susan Hardwick nothing. Susan patronized Mary without exactly meaning it, and it amused and interested her to hear all about Mary's love affairs.

"Jacob Marks was adopted by Theophilus Short, who keeps that tumble-down mill and inn on the little river, beyond Grass-moor."

"Well?"

"Poor Jacob, his father was Mr. Short's partner, and died without a will or anything, and Short said he died in his debt, and he adopted Jacob out of pity, people said; but Jacob is his right hand in managing the mill."

"Yes, and is he tall, and has he big shoulders, and can he throw the hammer and swing the quoit?"

“Better than any lad in the village, and he doesn’t drink; he has saved money. Oh, everybody likes him.”

“And Mary Kirk loves him,” said Susan, looking into the blushing face of the village girl, who promptly shut her eyes and laid her head on Susan’s shoulder.

Susan stroked the girl’s hair and smiled at her pretty confusion, and when Mary looked up again her face was wet with tears.

“I’m such a silly girl,” she said. “I don’t know what made me cry; but, you see, father and mother somehow like Tom Bertram best, and sometimes I think he likes me better than Jacob does.”

“And you have not quite made up your mind which of the two you mean to marry?” said Susan, still stroking Mary’s hair. “That is very awkward!”

“Oh! but I do know,” answered Mary.

“Tom Bertram is that harum-scarum young fellow who rode the steeplechase when Lord Ellerbie’s jockey fell ill?”

“Yes, yes,” answered Mary. “Do you know Tom Bertram?”

“I have heard of him.”

“Who told you about him?”

“Lord Ellerbie.”

“Do you know his lordship, then?”

“Yes, he visits here now and then.”

“Oh!” said Mary, as if a cloud had fallen upon her.

“Why do you say Oh, and freeze up in that way?”

“I don’t know; we all curtsy to Lord Ellerbie at Grassmoor, and when he comes into our church, which he does once a year, though he is a Catholic, we all stand up.”

“Indeed. I would like to see myself standing up when Lord Ellerbie or any-

body else came into church!" said Susan, with a scornful smile.

"It was at Brackenfield Towers that the ghost was seen," said Mary, looking more and more awe-stricken.

"Well, I am not a ghost," answered Susan; "what is the matter with the child?"

"It seems so strange that you should talk to his lordship, and your father be friendly with him and visit like, and that I should be your guest and friend too, and that he should talk of Tom Bertram, because he is so grand with us, you've no idea; and Brackenfield Towers is haunted with a ghost to a certainty, and they say he hates us all at Grassmoor because we know and have seen it."

"Well, you *are* a silly child! You have not over-estimated yourself, Mary, if you feel like that. Don't you love me, then,

because Lord Ellerbie comes here? And don't you want to talk about Tom Bertram because the ghost's master gossips about him."

"I'm glad it's day-time," Mary answered, looking round the old wainscoted room; "if it were night I should shut my eyes and bury my head under the bed-clothes."

"You dear, silly, sweet blossom of Arcadia!" exclaimed Susan, kissing her, "one day, when I make my return visit to the Home Farm, we will find out a time when Lord Ellerbie is away; and we will go and exorcise that ghost."

"It has a dagger in its right hand."

"Then we will get Jacob Marks or Tom Bertram to bring a blunderbuss, which is more than a match for a dagger," said Susan, laughing.

"But not for a ghost!" said Mary, seri-

ously, "you don't believe in ghosts; I suppose you don't have them in towns; but wait until you have seen one."

"Have you seen one?"

"No; but I know several people who have, and one Sunday your Vicar of Chesterfield preached about ghosts at our church, and he frightened us terribly; his text was from Job, and it was 'Fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before me; the hair of my flesh stood up; an image was before mine eyes.' Father and mother, too, thought he ought not to have preached about such things; we are frightened enough already on dark nights."

"Does Jacob Marks believe in ghosts?"

"Yes, indeed he does."

"I thought so. And Tom Bertram?"

"No; he says they're rubbish, and has

offered to fight the best ghost in the country for a wager."

"You are delightful," exclaimed Susan, "it is like reading a romance to have you here. And now come, put on your things, and let us take a walk round the market place and see the shops, and have a gossip at the letter-carrier's. Perhaps we shall see the London coach come in; this is the day for it, and there is not a bonnier sight in all the county."

CHAPTER II.

A PASSENGER BY THE LONDON MAIL.

The surly drums beat terrible afar,
With all the dreadful music of the war.

BROOME.

“**H**ARD times!” said the landlord of the Angel, in a rich jovial voice, as if hard times were something good to eat or drink, “hard times! Bless my heart, I should think so; but they’ll be harder yet, and what’s the good of blaming Government, when ministers is only mortal like ourselves.”

This brief summary of the situation was addressed to a select party of Chesterfield men, and other persons, who had dropped in to smoke and chat, and drink strong ale, after the business of the day was over. The Angel had a smoking-room with a bow window, that looked out upon the market-place, a large open space, surrounded with shops and private houses, where the market folks pitched their stalls on Saturdays, where the fairs were held, and, once a year, the town sports, that included sack-racing, pole-climbing, quoits, throwing the hammer, smoking, and women's races for new gowns. On ordinary days the market-place was unoccupied, except here and there by piles of stall fittings, and a travelling caravan or two: but these were placed well out of the way of the coaches that used to come into the town from the east corner, and

leave by the west, changing horses midway at the Angel.

“I tell you the manufacturers of England are being ruined,” said a local mill-owner, emphasizing the remark with a wave of his pipe.

“And what about the farmers?” asked Mr. George Kirk, of Grassmoor, who had, five minutes previously, ordered his mare to be put into his cart, intending to call at the Hall on his way home, and see if his daughter wanted anything. He had driven into Chesterfield with Tom Bert-ram during the afternoon on a little business, and they were just having a glass, “to set them on the way,” as he put it.

“What about the farmers?” repeated the manufacturer. “Oh! you’re always safe; we must have beef and bread, and I should judge Grassmoor is thriving, to look at you, Mr. Kirk.”

“ Ah ! well,” said the farmer, in a pleasant northern dialect, “ that’s all right ; we shannat do so badly, I reckon, so long as we get a tidy harvest.”

“ It’s cheerful,” said the landlord, “ to hear somebody besides myself as doesn’t complain ; at the same time, gentlemen, don’t think I am not sorry for my neighbours ; but what I say is things will be worse. A man can’t sit here day after day and talk to travellers by this coach and that, travellers posting and travellers riding, without picking up information ; and them as goes to and fro in the world knows how it wags, let me tell you that, gentlemen.”

“ Ay, ay,” remarked several quiet toppers, who approved of the oracular utterances of the host.

“ You needn’t go to and fro much to know things are bad and getting worse,”

said the manufacturer ; “ all very well to have whopped those Frenchmen at sea, but Bony will smash us on land, and what then ? ”

“ He’ll never do it ! ” said several voices together ; “ never ! ”

“ Never,” said the cantankerous politician, who hated the Government and blamed them for everything, weather, small-pox, dear bread, and the miserable condition of the roads, and would like to have had a great military defeat at their door, “ but he’s doing it, my friends ! It’s as bad to be stricken down in our trade as on the field of battle. Good heavens, don’t you read, any of you ? Don’t you know our industries are paralysed, our ships confiscated, every port closed against us ? ”

“ We’ll open them, every dam one of ’em ! ” exclaimed Tom Bertram, slapping

his empty tankard on the black shining mahogany table, ringed with the memorials of a century of pewter and silver cups.

“Bravo, Tom,” said Mr. Kirk.

“Open them !” said Tom, standing up, six feet of broad Anglo-Saxon manhood, “ay, and eat ’em !”

A round of cheers and a roar of laughter greeted his remark.

“Oh, indeed,” said the political economist, “and where do *you* get your opinions from, sir ?”

The “sir” was flung in cuttingly. But it fell upon Tom’s consciousness as harmlessly as a raindrop on a paving-stone.

“From history, master,” answered Tom, in a frank, fearless way, with a sufficient smack of dialect to show that he was a North-countryman, “from sort of natural feeling Englishman ha’ gotten in him, and from belief that we are made of same

mettle as our fathers, and from downright conviction as there is no nation, nor no twenty nations, that can smash us."

"Hear, hear," said the listeners, all but one, and the manufacturer, who, turning superciliously to Mr. Kirk as if he would ignore his friend, said: "Any nation! Why, doesn't the fellow know that our clever ministers have put us at enmity with all the world, and what do you think is to become of a little country like England with a conspiracy of nations against us abroad, and a world of discontent at home?"

"God will defend the right!" said Mr. Kirk.

"Then I wish he'd begin and do it," answered the politician.

"That's profane," said a severe, hard-looking man, who had hitherto appeared to take no interest in the conversation, and

who was the one silent member of the crowd just referred to, "that's blasphemy, and I can't listen to it."

"Very well, Mr. Short," said the landlord, "we know you're a bit religious, and so I'll fine the last speaker glasses round and pay it myself."

This restored the good humour of the company. The person who had objected to profanity did not refuse a glass of rum and water, which he declared was more wholesome in hot weather than beer.

"You are going on by the local coach, I suppose?" said the landlord.

"Unless Mr. Kirk will give me a lift," answered Theophilus Short.

"Of course I will! Tom, lad, have back seat put in cart," said the farmer.

By this time the vehicle was standing at the door at the Angel yard, and the travellers going to Grassmoor departed.

“That Short is a humbug!” said the politician, “a canting hypocrite, and I’m glad he’s gone; as for the young man, he is simply deluded, that’s all; but a fine lad, a fine lad.”

Mr. Kirk got down near the Hall, and, going up to the house, found Mary had gone out. He left a message with the housekeeper, merely his own and her mother’s love, and that of the children, and then away the Grassmoor cart rattled homewards. Tom and Mr. Short had some slight bickering on the road. When they put Short down where he could get home a near way across the fields, Tom made a very similar remark about him to that in which the Chesterfield politician had summed him up.

“I do believe the fellow is a damned scoundrel, that’s a fact!” said Kirk, “but

he's never been found out, thou sees, lad, that's it."

"Ah! he will be, let's hope," said Tom.

Meanwhile the grooms at the Angel had led out into the market-place four sleek bays with shining coats and polished hoofs, and at the same moment you heard a distant horn. Suddenly the precincts of the tavern were alive with loungers and lookers-on.

The toppers in the smoke-room came to the window and looked out, the landlord brought his pipe into the street, and regarded the proceedings with pride. The horses champed their bits, and presently from the eastern corner of the market-place came toiling along the mail-coach from London to Manchester, a picture of light, and life, and elegance. A whip flourished harmlessly over the steaming

cattle, a horn blown merrily behind, a flash of red and gold, and black and silver, and the coach pulled up in front of the Angel window; there was a rush of grooms and stable-helps; and luggage, horses, passengers almost together poured into the inn yard, and in less than five minutes the fresh team was harnessed. It was a sudden bustle and excitement, which lasted hardly any longer than the arrival and departure of the modern railway-train *en route*, and it had the advantage of being more picturesque. You knew that it had come from busy cities, through quiet country highways, by pleasant homesteads, over chattering streams bridged by ancient ways; that children had greeted it from field and hedgerow; that it had passed low lumbering waggons and farmers' gigs; that it had halted here and there to have the horses' mouths washed out and the

passengers regaled with foaming ale; that it was redolent of country lanes and grass lands, of hay and straw, and old-fashioned flowers. While we are thinking of the sight the passengers have seen, the whip is on the box again. "Now, Bill, let go their heads. So ho! Beauty; steady, old lass. Away you go!" Forward dashes the team, the guard swings up behind, and Mary Kirk, standing with Susan Hardwick at the primitive Post-office door, whence the mailbags had just been carried in and out, said it was indeed a bonny sight to see the fast coach change horses at the Angel.

"And I wonder if that foreign-looking person standing by the hotel yard is Mr. Philip Scruton," said Miss Hardwick; "let us ask the Post-office's daughter. She will not be able to tell us, but we can talk to her, she is very nice."

It was a quaint little place, the postal

house of those days situated near the Angel tavern. The business of receiving and distributing the correspondence of Chesterfield and the neighbourhood was carried on in connection with dealings in hay and straw and stationery. There was a little room at the back of the post-office's shop, where Jessie Burns was generally to be found, helping to keep her father's books, he having been promoted in life, not on account of his learning and intelligence, but out of respect to his local patron, the Reverend Normanby Wingfield, Vicar of Chesterfield, an appointment by which there hangs a tale. The vicar and Mac, as everybody called him, had been soldiers together, Mac a sergeant in Colonel Wingfield's regiment, and when the Colonel laid down the weapons of the flesh and returned to the practice of those of the spirit, to which he had been originally educated,

Burns's time was up, and his Colonel had sufficient influence to obtain for him the post-office in the old midland town where his ancestral living was situated.

Duncan was a Scotchman, and Jessie was a sandy-haired Scotch lassie, with a tendency to Puritanism and fine ribbons, a union about which Chesterfield was very censorious. Jessie was a clever girl. She sang in the church choir, collected subscriptions for the missions, and was the neatest, tidiest, smartest lassie in all the borough, firm on her feet, but sly, the gossips said, decidedly sly; and she flirted with the vicar's son uncommonly. There was the faintest lilt of the pibroch in her voice and manner, just a piquant suggestion of the Highlands; and when she received Miss Hardwick and Mary Kirk in that little parlour behind the post-office, that trinity of fair women I told you of was

now complete. You might have travelled the world over, and not have seen three girls half as pretty, each a type, each a beauty, who had no cause to be jealous of the other.

“I saw the gentleman; he was on the coach when it came in,” said Jessie. “Yes, he was, and I do not know Mr. Scruton, who they say will be the next Laird o’ Ellerbie, but I should think, from what I’ve heard, that yon odd-looking person is him. I heard the vicar say he is worse than a Jacobite, and he looks very foreign.”

“You have heard about him, then?” said Susan, in her quiet inquiring way.

“Well, only just what the vicar said to father, ye ken,” answered Jessie, cautiously; “but you should be the best-informed about him, Miss Hardwick.”

“I only know that he was a boy here, and that he went away to be educated,

that he has never returned since, and is reported to have had some strange adventures," said Susan.

"But ye ken Laird Ellerbie? He was visiting at the Hall a good deal, and the vicar says he talks about the young man with much anger."

Jessie looked mischievously at Miss Hardwick, crossed her arms upon her knees, and leaned back in her chair. Mary Kirk sat tranquilly listening, but thinking all the time about what she would say in reply to that letter she had received from Jacob Marks.

"You are wicked to-day, Jessie," said Miss Hardwick. "You have got your scandal cap on."

"Oh, Miss Hardwick, you are unkind to say that. I know you come to hear the news, and I don't make the news."

"You are the most truthful girl in

Chesterfield, Jessie, but you have your own way of emphasising and setting forth a fact. Do the people talk about Lord Ellerbie's visits to the Hall?"

"Yes, indeed they do."

"And what do the poor creatures say?—that he is going to be my father's partner?"

Susan knew that Chesterfield had the measure of her father's purse, and that he was noted for his pride, his thrift, for his love of speculation, for his losses, and also for his troubles with the mill; so she confronted the opinion of the town straight.

"No, they were not saying that; but you will be angry if I tell you."

"It is not possible for all Chesterfield to make me angry, whatever it may say or think," Susan answered, her eyes flashing a sparkling denial of the declaration.

"Well, then, they say the partner Lord

Ellerbie will be taking is just yourself, Miss Hardwick."

"Jessie!" exclaimed Susan, "this is disgraceful!"

"Ye made me tell ye," said Jessie.

"And was that a piece of news you heard the vicar tell your father," said Susan, rising, and glancing a command to Mary to do the same, "or was it the vicar's martial son who told you, Jessie Burns, when your father was out."

The millowner's daughter and her friend took their leave on this, Mary a little confused at being witness of an unexpected and unpleasant scene (which appeared to have humiliated Susan), and Miss Hardwick evidently both angry and hurt.

"Eh, but that's a spiteful lassie," said Jessie Burns, smoothing her dainty apron, and looking at herself in a hand mirror. "I declare but she's fetched the colour into

my cheeks! Eh, George, but I hope ye nor me may have to suffer for my sharp tongue, nor my faith and trust in your ower kind words and loving promises!"

CHAPTER III.

THE STRANGER BRINGS TROUBLE IN HIS TRAIN.

The miller plyed a double trade,
A double trade plyed he;
By day a saint who'd sing a hymn,
At night a rover free.

IT was a different-looking market-place then, the picturesque old square that Philip Scruton looked upon, from that which modern progress has made it. The railway "navvy," the pitman of Staveley and Claycross, the Irish labourer, had not darkened its ways, and called into existence cheap stores and strange lodging-houses.

The reign of stucco, and brick, and blue slates had not yet wiped out the old Sessions-house, the Gothic mansion, the English bay-windows, the clump of thatched cottages by the West Bars, and the glints of green country that filled in the ends of the passages on the lower pavement of the old resort of local trade and commerce. The people were dressed characteristically, each class as became its station; and there were French prisoners of war, on their parole of honour, lounging under the piazzas, and dreaming of their native land. Then, as now, the steeple of the ancient church, rivalling the tower of Pisa, leaned over the town, as if listening to the music of the brook that once ran shimmering and glassy over smooth pebbles, and which now creeps along dark and tainted. The steeple is twisted, as if in recoil at the smudges

which coal and commerce, and an unclean invasion, have made upon the once dreamy historic town, never quite lovely in itself, but looking from a height like a rough gem in a gorgeous setting of emerald and gold.

Philip was not sorry to be again in a safe place, though he scorned a quiet life, and had no scruples about the character of the adventures in which he engaged. He had made, however, one serious mistake in his reckless acceptance of dangerous service, and that was in connection with a secret society of Spain, a semi-religious Brotherhood which had for its object the promotion of the temporal power of the Church, the secular advancement of its chiefs in the diplomatic world, and the removal of obstacles, heretical, spiritual, or otherwise, to the schemes of the Society. The Brotherhood in numbers

was but a small association, but it had far-reaching influences and agencies; and Philip Scruton had reason to congratulate himself that he had escaped the action of its continental ramifications; for he was under the ban of the sacred Brotherhood. He had never been true to anybody, not even to the ministerial agents who had employed him in the interest of his own country; it was therefore not surprising that even the solemn Penal Oath of the Secret Society of Madrid had failed to hold him when the Brotherhood was outbidden by a Roman emissary.

A year or two ago, when Lord Beaconsfield in the House of Lords referred to the tremendous power of the secret societies of Europe, many people laughed at him. Perhaps they were right from their point of view, perhaps they were wrong; this is not a political novel (and I hold Mr. Glad-

stone's intellectual power in reverent admiration); but, since the Premier made that well-known speech, Nihilism and Socialism have come prominently to the fore.

In the troubled times of which I am writing there were then as now many strange, not to say bloodthirsty, organizations, held together by oaths and vows, and kept secret by signs and ceremonies, to outrage which was death. Philip Scruton was the sort of person to run grave, prospective risks for present and immediate advantages. He had done a thing which might be atoned for by some great act of sacrifice or penance as a certain Council of Three might decide; or might only be wiped out by the penalty prescribed in the oath of obedience. Philip had not waited for the verdict, but had escaped to England, with this Madrid

trouble, which he no longer feared outside Spain, hanging over him.

“ Ah, here they come !” said the foreign-looking gentleman, taking a pinch of snuff from a showy box, and looking across the market-place at a lumbering carriage, drawn by a pair of what we should now-a-days call cart-horses. A servant sat on the box, but the vehicle was driven by a postillion, who jumped up and down in his seat, and flourished a short whip with the air of one who was performing a great feat.

“ Beg pardon, your honour, we came by way of Grassmoor, his lordship thinking you might get down there, and if you did not then we thought we’d ha’ met you in the road.”

The servant had descended from his seat as he spoke.

“The bit way round made us late.”

“Why, did not his lordship know that I should want something to eat, and that the Angel is the best tavern between here and the Towers? *I* might be excused for forgetting, but his lordship should have known. Why, in Heaven’s name, should I want to stay at Grassmoor? They warned me at starting that not a single fast coach halts there even to wash the horses’ mouths out, let alone those of the passengers.”

“That’s true, your honour, and so I tow’d lordship, and at same time I mentioned, as it’s only a mile or two more, to drive you from hither to Towers.”

“Very well; go then into the Angel and help them to serve my dinner; see that a bottle of their oldest madeira is put on the sideboard at once—decantered, mind

you ; and if that capon is tough, tell old Obsequious I'll have his licence confiscated."

The servant saluted and disappeared ; while the other man stood by the horses' heads.

"Take them out, boy," said Mr. Scruton, "take them out."

"Why, yo' hannot goin' to wait long, han yer?"

He was a rough, uncultivated groom, the postillion.

"Wait? Yes, an hour or two!"

"We'll have it dark," said the lad.

"You may have it black as Erebus, if you like."

"Yes, your honour, an' blacker," was the quick reply. "An' owd Guy Fawkes may have us, for there's been the devil to play on the roads lately."

"Take out the horses; give them a feed."

By this time the Angel's ostlers came to the traveller's rescue, and the carriage and horses disappeared in the tavern yard.

“The London coaching master seems to have known what he was talking about,” said the passenger. “Well, I'm prepared for either fortune; and I'm most prepared for a good dinner and a bottle of wine. It's a slow old country; but, by the mass, it knows how to drink and what to drink! One slips below the table like a gentleman under the liquor of an islander. Three months in London has taught me that. If it was not for the drink, I'll be hanged but the old country would be unbearable. Yet this market-place has much of the look of the Normans who conquered us, and who will do it again under the little Emperor. It is not so clean nor so sleepy as it was. I can only just remember it. I wonder if

the wenches are as pretty as I somehow fancy they are."

The foreign-looking gentleman, soliloquising by the old tavern gateway, was Philip Scruton, the very last of the Ellerbie family, and nephew of the earl whom we have heard of through the feminine and other gossips in our previous chapter. Philip's mother had died when he was born, and his father had been killed in some disreputable affair in London. Lord Ellerbie kept the boy at Brackenfield Towers until he was ten, and had then sent him in charge of a diplomatic friend to be educated abroad, in the hope, Philip always said, that he had then got rid of him for good. The times were full of trouble, and Philip had had many strange escapes from death. His uncle had supplied him liberally with funds, and the lad had led a life

of debauchery and adventure, breaking easily away from the small links of restraint which had, for a time, bound him to those who had authority over him. A perfect master of the French language, continental in manners and appearance, a Roman Catholic in his profession of faith, it was hard to believe that he had had any difficulty in escaping from Paris. But in a letter written from London, announcing his visit to the Towers, he said he had been peculiarly fortunate, by a shrewd intrigue, in getting out of the Napoleonic clutches. He hated his uncle as cordially as Lord Ellerbie hated him, though Lord Ellerbie's was a weak and shuffling nature. The Earl had not the courage to be exactly a villain; but he was guilty of meannesses, and would encompass his ends by craft and trickery, where Philip Scruton would

have achieved his by open rascality, not hesitating at crime, not even stopping at murder.

It was not a worthy stock, this aristocratic strain of Ellerbie. It had come into rank and title, like too many other noble families, through the adulteries of kings and the shameful intrigues of royal mistresses, and there seemed to be a blight on it. Old Lord Ellerbie had been twice married. Both his wives had died young and childless. Both had increased his estates. Do not from this imagine that there had been any foul play; there had not. Yet they called Lord Ellerbie "Blue Beard" at Chesterfield, those who dared do so; though the ladies admitted he had pleasant manners and a most aristocratic appearance, while his wealth had become a proverb, and his family residence a mystery with a ghost in it.

A tall, imposing-looking young man, Philip Scruton wore a short-waisted, high-collared, long-tailed blue coat, linked by tags and buttons over a florid waistcoat and high stock. He had on a pair of tight-fitting pantaloons, and long boots of thin, crumply leather. A conical-shaped hat, with band and buckle, dangling watch seals, and a gold-mounted cane completed the costume. Lying among his luggage, were an ample cloak, a sword, and pistol-holsters. It was a daring sensual face; the eyes were close together; they looked at you coldly, as if they hardly saw you, unless you were a pretty woman; and then they had something of the serpent in their glazystare. The eyebrows met, the eyes were deeply set, the mouth was large, the teeth white and regular, the nose prominent and fleshy, the forehead retreated beneath a shock of black hair which fell luxuriantly

behind the ears. He wore a moustache, black and silky as his hair, and an imperial, which fell from his chin upon his stock. He had a habit of stroking this tuft of hair and twirling his moustache, and smiling in a mocking kind of way. Glanced at superficially, he might have been regarded as a handsome young man. He was superstitious, selfish, a false friend, a schemer, and a drunkard; and he was not loyal to his country. Despite title and wealth, his uncle, Lord Ellerbie, was not popular in the county; he was shunned even by his own class, and the dignity of the house had no promise of advancement in the advent of the Honourable Philip Scruton.

It was dark when the distinguished passenger from London pulled himself together and staggered to his carriage. The Angel madeira was a potent liquor, and

Mr. Scruton had drunk deeply. Therefore, an hour after starting for Brackenbury Towers, trundling along through leafy lanes, and jolting over ancient ruts and boulders, Mr. Scruton was asleep. The ship-like motion of the carriage only served to rock him into a sound slumber. In active contrast was a horseman, who had been scouring the road and reconnoitering it from the meadows, always coming back to the shelter of a clump of trees, by the half-buried arches of an ancient water-course, called the Old Bridge, a dark, lonely spot, which, like many other similar places in Derbyshire, had its tradition of battle, ghost, or murder. There was no truth in the legend, but a foul crime was supposed to have been committed here, and the villagers of Grassmoor said, if you looked, you would find the date engraved on the half-buried buttresses.

When Lord Ellerbie's postillion arrived at this notorious point of the road, he lashed his horses and bade them "come up," instead of which they came down; and, before the servants knew where they were, a couple of bags were over their heads, they were tied together, and told in a hoarse whisper that if they moved they were dead men. They did not move. Neither did Mr. Philip Scruton. He was so fast asleep that the highwayman, having cut the traces and loosened the horses (which got up and began to graze by the road side), approached the carriage with great caution, evidently expecting a blaze of firearms to greet him from the window. But when he opened the door, he ran over Mr. Scruton's pockets, took his purse, and was gone before the traveller had at all realized what had happened.

There had been within the twelve

months three highway robberies near this very spot, and in two instances at quite an early hour in the evening. In each case the work was said to be that of one man, who rode so well, was so bold and expeditious, that he was believed to be the same dashing operator who had appeared also at intervals on the coaching road beyond Chesterfield, where the highway begins to mount up among the wild beauties of the Peak.

It was not yet half-past ten o'clock when Mr. Scruton, on one of the carriage horses, rode into the inn yard, dismounted, and entered the bar-parlour, where Mr. Theophilus Short was smoking his pipe with a couple of guests and a neighbour, who were at that very moment talking about highwaymen. There was nothing particularly novel in the new arrival's announcement, except his em-

phatic assurance that he should discover the thief.

“Was it the work of one man?” asked the innkeeper.

“The question is truly a reflection on myself, but more particularly on Lord Ellerbie’s servants,” said Mr. Scruton; “but I was in possession of two bottles of the old madeira, and the highwayman, it seems, covered the two dolts with a pair of pistols before they knew where they were.”

“It was a daring robbery,” said Mr. Short; “truly our highways are a disgrace to the King and Government. It can hardly be that the robber must have known the condition you were in, sir.”

“I would be inclined to think he is some dare-devil who didn’t care, and who would have presented me with an ounce of lead the moment I showed myself. I

would have done that for him had I not been dreaming; but I shall catch the thief; it will amuse me to run him down, the unmannerly, impudent son of darkness! Let me have a bottle of the best wine you have in your cellar, and in the meantime dispatch a fellow along the road on the horse I've ridden; let him take some twine to mend our traces, and send Lord Ellerbie's carriage home, for I mean to sleep here to-night."

The innkeeper, in reply, said he was only a poor man, and had no servants on the premises at night, except an old woman and a young man, who had gone to bed; but his neighbour, Thomas, would do what he required; whereupon Thomas, who had been sitting open-mouthed, bestirred himself and went forth. The other two persons, who appeared to be cattle-drovers or hawkers, men of no ac-

count, bade Mr. Short good night, and went out also.

“Are they not staying in the house?” Scruton asked.

“They sleep in the barn,” said the innkeeper; “they are poor men, like myself, and cannot afford better accommodation.”

“Times are bad with you?” said Scruton.

“Well, they are not good with anyone; but since the coaches took to the new road which takes off the bit of hill by the bridge, this inn has decayed; it’s only used by a few travellers, and what little we make comes out of the mill. I am a miller, you see, sir, as well as an innkeeper.”

“And, I should judge, a preacher too, by your manner.”

“Indeed; nay, why should you think so?”

“Well, you have that fine nasal tone of

voice and that air of conscious virtue which belong to English Puritans, who combine trade and psalm-singing so successfully. I'm hanged if I don't think the villain who fingered my purse was one of them."

"Nay, you dishonour your own judgment to say so," replied Theophilus Short, looking his guest steadily in the face.

"Nay me no more nays, but fetch that bottle of wine," said Scruton, unbuttoning his coat, and taking a pinch of snuff.

"Did you say port wine or madeira?" asked the inn-keeper, lighting a lantern and proceeding to leave the room.

"Whichever you like best, for we'll drink it together."

Mr. Short bowed.

"Unless you are too much of a crop-eared Puritan to drink."

“Good wine is not a sin,” said the innkeeper, disappearing.

“No, by the mass it is not,” said Scruton to himself, and for the first time surveying the room.

It was a handsome place in decay. An old wainscoted bar, with faded coats of arms over the fireplace, and a couple of flint muskets on brackets; a few pewter cups and old fashioned jugs below them; some tall ale-glasses and spirit-bottles on a shelf; an old oak bench by the fireplace; two or three high-backed chairs; a solid black mahogany table in the middle of a sanded floor; two candles in sconces on the wall, and one upon the table; a fusty smell of malt and tobacco smoke. Such was the general impression made upon the observer. Not a sound could be heard, except the distant grating cry of a corncrake in the meadows.

“By all that’s unholy,” said Scruton, and he was startled at the sound of his own voice, “it’s a murderous place! I don’t know that I remember a more lonely-looking den outside Spain or Germany, but I don’t know much about England, though my memory of Brackenbury Towers seems to wake up under the present mouldy influences. My blessed uncle will have the satisfaction of replenishing my purse in the first hour of my arrival. I have a presentiment we shall quarrel and want each other’s blood in less than four and twenty hours.”

“The wine,” said the innkeeper at Scruton’s elbow.

“The devil!” said Scruton.

“No, your honour. There is no brimstone about this.”

“I did not hear you come out of the cellar,” said Scruton, looking curiously at the landlord.

“I have a light tread,” replied the innkeeper. “I am afraid your adventure has shaken your nerves; nay, I would not pay your honour so ill a compliment as to question your courage.”

“If you did I might give you a painful proof of it,” said Scruton, pouring out two glasses of wine.

“You have seen many lands, and must often have had use for your valour and strength. I would be sorry you should try them on me.”

“Then sit down, you old scarecrow,” said Scruton, “and drink.”

“You are a merry gentleman,” replied the innkeeper, raising the glass to his lips; “good health!”

“And a short shrift to the unhappy knight of the road who now carries my purse.”

“Why do you say unhappy?”

"That is my affair."

"Truly. I hope I don't vex you by my conversation."

"Vex me? No; so long as you know your place."

"That one always knows in the presence of a gentleman."

"There you say well! What is your name?"

"Short, Theophilus Short."

"Very well, Theophilus Short, your wine is better than your company; but we shall meet again. How far is it to Brackenbury Towers?"

"Five miles."

"Do you know me?"

"It distresses me to say no; I never saw you before."

"I am Philip Scruton, Lord Ellerbie's heir."

"You overwhelm me, Mr. Scruton!

I knew you when you were a boy."

"You honour me by the recollection," said Scruton, twirling his imperial. "The wine is excellent; another bottle, Short."

"Your honour is too good. I brought a second up with me, thinking to ask you to drink it with me; but now that you have proclaimed your quality, nay, I would not presume to think of such a liberty."

"It's no liberty, Short. I accept your hospitality. I begin to like you. Tell me, is not the village of Grassmoor near here?"

"About a mile. It lies between this and your lordship's estate. I beg pardon, I mean your honour's; though, without wishing harm to the present earl, I would be glad to see the heir come to his own."

"Wish him harm! Confound him! Wish him harm! He's no friend of mine,"

said Scruton, at the same time suddenly checking himself, and adding, "No, no; I ask his forgiveness; I did not mean that. Forget what I said."

"I don't remember a word of it," replied Short.

"You are not a preacher, you are a diplomat, you old rogue. You are a diplomat. I'll have thee promoted. Hush! Tell me, old fox, are there any pretty girls in that same village of Grassmoor?"

"Secret for secret," said Short.

"By all means," answered Philip. "If you want to tell me I'm drunk, you may say it, no offence being meant."

"No, your honour, I would not be so unpolite as to remind you of your happiness; but about these pretty girls. I can give you a list of all the bright eyes in the county; and Derbyshire has just as many of them as all the Midlands put together."

“Well, well; go on, old Barebones, old sly fox!”

“When you’ve told me how you’ll catch that thief who has your purse.”

“Oh! well, it’s no secret; the coaching master in London made me mark my money; I hadn’t much to deface, for that matter, and I let him do it for amusement. Every guinea the rogue carried off is marked, and if that does not hang him in the end, I’m no prophet.”

There was a loud knocking at the door. Mr. Theophilus Short became suddenly anxious. He looked from his guest to the door, and from the door to his guest.

“Open, in the King’s name!” said a loud voice, and the next moment an officer entered.

The robberies on the Derbyshire highways had given the district a special notoriety, and the Government were resolved

to put them down. By the time the new comer had signified who he was, and had demanded shelter for a couple of men and three horses, Mr. Theophilus Short had settled his course of action.

“Was your money marked like that?” he asked, showing a guinea to Mr. Scruton, who had repeated his story to the officer.

“It was ; that is one of the pieces.”

“It is as I feared,” said the inn-keeper, with a deep sigh. “I felt assured disgrace would fall upon me sooner or later. A few minutes before you arrived, I gave my young man, Jacob Marks, a lad I adopted out of charity as my own, a guinea to pay the blacksmith’s little account. He comes back and says the man’s a-bed, and returns me the guinea. It struck me the gold was not the same as that I gave him, and I meant to have questioned him on it, when you and some neighbours came in.”

“Where is the fellow now?”

“Snoring in bed.”

“Then we’ll have him awakened,” said the officer.

“He that doeth evil let his sin be upon him; ay, if he were my own flesh and blood,” said Mr. Short. “I’ll go and call him.”

“No, you stay where you are,” said the officer, taking a whistle from his pocket and blowing a shrill pipe.

A smart, soldierly-looking fellow in private clothes entered the room.

“Where does the young fellow sleep?” asked the officer.

“In the attic at the back, up the stairs there by the clock, along the passage and up again,” said Short, with a scared look, directing the man.

“Young man in bed; bring him down,” said the officer, and in a few minutes Mary

Kirk's lover, poor Jacob Marks, a fine-looking young fellow, was standing in amazement before the company.

"Did your master give you a guinea to pay the blacksmith?"

"Mr. Short did."

"What did you do with it?"

"Gave it him back."

"What have you done with the others?"

"Which others?"

"In the purse?"

"What purse?"

The officer thought there was a guilty look in Jacob's startled face.

"Oh, come; you know."

"I don't."

"But you acknowledge to one guinea; where's the others then?"

"What others?"

"Don't ask me questions, sir," said the officer, angrily.

While this examination was going on, Mr. Short had busied himself about the room, and had loudly repeated an order he pretended Mr. Scruton had given him "Another bottle, and one for His Majesty's officer? Yes, your honour," which had taken him out of the room, not to the cellar. Had he been watched, he would have been seen creeping like a shadow to Jacob's room, and then as nimbly dropping over an open balcony by the kitchen, and getting into the cellar that way. He returned just as the officer, still angrier at Jacob's answer, was ordering his man to light a lantern and conduct him to the young man's bed-room.

"Better all come along; there can't be too many witnesses in a case of this sort," said the officer, and they all tramped up the stairs into the attic where Jacob, in his innocence, had been dreaming of a

happy time in which village bells were ringing, and he was the bridegroom before the village altar, and Mary Kirk the bride.

“Excuse me, gentlemen, I will stay here. I would give up my father if he transgressed the law, but I don’t think justice would require that I should see him hanged.”

Jacob looked on as one still in a dream while they rummaged his room. Presently, holding up a coat which had lain across a chair, the officer asked—

“Is this yours?”

“Yes,” answered Jacob.

“Did you wear it last night?”

“Yes.”

“And is this yours?” asked the officer, taking a purse from one of the pockets.

“No.”

“Is it yours?” asked the officer, holding up the lantern so that the light fell upon it.

“By St. Paul, it is!” said Mr. Scruton, “and I’ll thank you to deliver it up, for I haven’t a guinea to pay my score.”

“That may not be at present,” said the officer; “we hold it for evidence, and we bind you over to appear in court, identifying it in due course. Young man, what is your name?”

“Jacob Marks.”

“Jacob Marks, I arrest you in the King’s name, for robbery on the King’s highway.”

“I am innocent,” said Jacob.

“Very likely,” said the officer; “but they’ll hang you all the same unless you make your innocence plainer to the judges than you have done to me.”

CHAPTER IV.

A MATRIMONIAL CONSPIRACY AND A LEGEND.

Sing, muses nine,
 The joys of wine,
 When George the Third was King.
 Three bottle men
 Were common then
 As green leaves in the spring.

BRACKENBURY TOWERS is an old mansion which, under another name, still attracts the attention of the curious, and is not unknown to the antiquarian societies of England.

It is half hidden among oaks and elms and chestnut-trees in the valley below the

little village of Grassmoor. In winter-time you can see the grey stone walls and gables, the old watch-tower, and the lake; in spring you only get flashes of the water through the green branches of the woods; and in summer the mere slumbers there, fringed with bulrushes, and shut out from view until you come suddenly upon it.

At all times you might, until a few years ago, hear the roar of the wild animals which the Ellerbie family kept in a sort of circus near the stables; and at strange hours you may still hear the chiming of bells in the restored family chapel that joins the west wing of the house. The Ellerbies had been Roman Catholics for many generations. They had suffered for the Church, and the red history of the family had no doubt done much to earn for Brackenbury Towers the reputation of being haunted.

Lord Ellerbie, though he still maintain-

ed a kind of ceremonial show of the faith, was tolerant, as in those times he was compelled to be, and now and then attended the services of the Protestant church, which was a sort of chapel of ease for Grassmoor. He did more in token of his liberal views : he subscribed towards some repairs to the crooked spire of Chesterfield, and he gave money to all the charities of the market town, irrespective of their religious character. He made these gifts through Mr. Septimus Dobbs, a lawyer, who had charge of the Ellerbie business, and who was noted for his professions of honesty and his acts of utter unscrupulousness.

Now there was a legend in the Ellerbie family which was not altogether pleasant for the last of the race to reflect upon ; and this may have led to the old lord's determination to marry again, though it had certainly nothing to do with his choice

of the lady whom he destined for the honour of sharing his latter days.

Jessie Burns, the pretty Scotch scandal-monger of the post-office at Chesterfield, had hit the right nail on the head when she impudently suggested to Miss Susan Hardwick that she was the partner the tottering old lord was looking after ; and, what is more, William Rutland Hardwick, Esquire, of the Hall, had made up his mind to the sacrifice.

The alliance of the two old greybeards against the belle of Chesterfield had only been ratified on the day when Oliver North had made that communication concerning the mill, which Mr. Hardwick had resolved to give up as a means of income, to rely for the future upon the bounty of Lord Ellerbie. Hardwick was too poor to fight civil rioters and anti-progressionists. He had none of the

pride of the manufacturers, who stood by their machines and fought the battle of Invention at home as sturdily as their countrymen waged the war of Liberty abroad. Old Hardwick had only drifted into trade by the force of circumstances. He was an aristocrat born and bred. A county gentleman, he dated his family origin as far back as the Ellerbies. The Hall in which he lived, railed off from Lordsmill Street, had been one of the smallest of the Hardwick residences which two centuries previously might have been found on the maps of four counties. Soon after the French revolution, when the industries of England were making marked progress, Mr. Hardwick had been persuaded to build a silk-mill in the little park adjacent to the Hall, which had kept him in continual financial trouble. If in the greatest hour of trial he had stood by

Oliver North, the young designer and manager, whom he had taken into his confidence for a time, he might have weathered the storm and become even richer than his ancestors were; equal in wealth to Lord Ellerbie himself. But he had neither the courage of his progenitors, who had won their lands at the point of the sword, nor the shrewdness of Lord Ellerbie, who hitherto had married an estate with each of his wives.

“But what I want now,” said Lord Ellerbie to Mr. Hardwick, as they sat over a bottle of port wine in the old lord’s library at Brackenbury Towers, “is a pleasant companion, a beautiful woman worthy of a coronet, and——”

“Who has blood equal to your own,” said Mr. Hardwick, smacking his lips and looking the earl defiantly in the face.

“Well, well,” responded his lordship,

with a senile protest in his bleary eyes, "well, well, blood is one thing, money another."

"Blood is everything," said Hardwick, stretching himself to the full height of the high-backed chair in which he was sitting, "money is dross."

"I know, I know," said the earl, fidgeting with his glass, "we will not argue about it; let us consider we are agreed."

"You settle Brackenbury Towers, and ten thousand a year, upon Miss Hardwick; her son, should I have the good fortune to be a grandfather, inherits title and estates."

"Naturally; yes, yes; we could not avoid that if we would. It is the rightful and legitimate succession; and I shall adhere to my promise to you furthermore, and apart from other things."

“That promise you will have put into writing, duly signed and attested.”

“Truly, truly. I am a man of honour, Mr. Hardwick.”

“And I a man of business,” said Hardwick, pluming himself on his repartee.”

“They don’t think so down at Chesterfield,” said the earl, chuckling in his turn.

“They! Who are they, my lord?” exclaimed Mr. Hardwick, rising. “They, who are they, in the beggarly hole which I honour with my presence? Who are they, sir, that have cast reflections upon a Hardwick?”

“There, there, don’t be angry; I humbly beg your pardon, Hardwick,” said the old earl, as he filled up his glass, and conveyed it to his lips with a trembling hand.

“Mr. Septimus Dobbs, I suppose,” replied Hardwick; “he is the only person who would be guilty of intermeddling in

my affairs; but I shall repay that knavish lawyer of yours yet, Lord Ellerbie."

"He's well enough. I find him faithful," murmured the earl, between two capacious draughts of wine.

"Yet you would let him insult your father-in-law."

"No, not at all; I will reprove him. When shall the wedding be?"

"I will talk to my daughter. I will advise with Miss Hardwick," said the prospective father-in-law of the master of Brackenbury Towers.

"Let it be soon, let it be soon," said the earl, rising and staggering towards the door. "Good night, Hardwick."

"Good night, sir," responded Mr. Hardwick, adding, as the earl disappeared, "I have seen him to bed; a narrow escape of seeing him under the table. I have drunk bottle for bottle with him, nevertheless."

"What, what!" he heard the earl suddenly exclaim, and then there was a hubbub of voices in the corridor, and the butler, with several other servants, followed the postillion and the staggering lord back into the library, "robbed, that is not much; is he murdered?"

"No, my lord, it is not as bad as that; highwayman chap wor better-mannered."

"Oh! very well," said the earl, supporting himself with his hand on the table, as he sat down in his chair.

"It wor all done before you could wink. Me and Bill with our yeds in sacks and tied wi' a rope, and him, Mester Philip, wi' his purse whipped out like shelling peas."

"Yes, yes, and no shooting?" asked the earl.

"Not a wad; and Mester Philip he's puttin' up for the night wi' Mester Short, at the Miller and his Men."

“Oh! very well,” said the earl; “and was my gentleman sober?”

“When highwayman chap wor gone he wor sober.”

“Before then, man? Where did you stop on the road?”

“My gentleman got his dinner at Angel i’ Chesterfield.”

“Yes, yes.”

“And we lugged him i’t carriage as drunk as a lord.”

“I thought so,” rejoined the earl, reaching out his hand in a maudlin way for his empty glass. “The reprobate! He shan’t stay here. I’ll pay none of his debts; I’ll make him no more allowances; so good night to you all.”

Lord Ellerbie once more shuffled out of the room, and Mr. Hardwick took up the story.

“Did the gentleman make no resistance?”

asked Mr. Hardwick, stretching out his legs and thrusting his hands into his breeches pockets.

“He didn’t show no feight at all.”

“And you?”

“Me! why, I was down wi’ horses.”

“And your fellow servant?”

“He came tumbling a top of ’em.”

“They were thrown, then?”

“Just as if legs bin shotten from under ’em.”

“Very well,” responded Hardwick, without deigning to look at the wondering group, and already feeling a sense of ownership of the Towers, “you may get to bed, except Mr. Pease.”

The servants humbly took their leave, with the exception indicated.

“Mr. Pease.”

“Yes, sir,” said the butler, a rubicund, stolid-looking man.

"You may sit down."

"By your leave, sir," said Pease.

"You did not appear to be quite at one with your master, the earl, in his remarks concerning Mr. Philip Scruton."

"I've been in the Ellerbie service man and boy for five and forty years, Master Hardwick."

"And feel yourself one of the family, I daresay, quite," said Hardwick; "suppose we have another bottle and talk it over."

"By your leave, sir," replied Mr. Pease, solemnly, withdrawing from the room.

It was a shadowy-looking apartment lighted by clusters of candles in ornamental metal sconces at intervals in the oak bookshelves. The lights were repeated in an old-fashioned mirror over the panelled mantel-piece in long blinking processions. Books in calf and parchment bindings, in

old leather with gilt lettering, and in various sizes, were ranged in companies, in regiments, in battalions, in brigades. They seemed to be on an everlasting parade, waiting for the order to advance or retire. They were like an army presenting arms, always standing there at the royal salute, trim, solid, keeping their facings, and with the dust of a hundred field-days on them, as if the king and his staff had inspected them and ridden away without the order to shoulder arms, stand at ease, and finally dismiss. The candles winked and blinked in their sconces, as if they knew all about it and dared not mention it for the world. Grim busts of classic heroes looked at each other from their pedestals between the ranks where the literary troops had halted, as it were, at company distance, and seemed to say "it will be all right when the king and his cocked hat and feathers return,"

and then we too may have permission to step down.

“By your leave, sir, after you,” said the butler. “I hope you will approve of this ; it is from my own bin. Give you good health, Master Hardwick.”

The aristocratic mill-owner *did* approve of it. The wine was a revelation. It seemed to inspire him, and it also loosened Mr. Pease’s tongue.

“You see, sir, since you take an interest in my opinions, I reckon you would just like to be knowing why I don’t quite agree with his lordship being again his relation, Master Philip Scruton ; not close relation, it be true, but heir to property, and *only* heir, which, if he was to die, would leave lordship without heir, last of all the Ellerbie lot.”

“Well, Mr. Pease,” said Hardwick, encouragingly, and in a patronizing way,

which was intended to inform the worthy man he must not presume on his condescension.

“By your leave,” said Pease, as if fully conscious of the warning, and desirous to re-assure Mr. Hardwick that he was quite safe, though in his time he had hob-nobbed with the great.

“Certainly, Mr. Pease, you have my permission, and I find it most instructive to listen to you.”

“It is all about that legend of the family as I was thinking on, and depend upon it the day will come, just as the end of the world must in time, Lord save us!” said Pease, crossing himself.

“You are a Papist, then, Mr. Pease?”

“By your leave, sir,” said Pease, “though it is not incumbent on me to say by your leave to that, I am a pretty good Catholic, I hope.”

“Yes, quite right; pardon me, Mr. Pease. I did not intend to——”

“No offence,” said Pease. “I have it on Father Busby’s authority that the butlers in the Ellerbie family have been Catholics for five hundred years, and it would ill become me to break the charm, though I don’t think I would have strength enough for martyrdom.”

Mr. Pease smiled, and, with a “by your leave,” helped himself to wine.

“You were speaking of the legend, tradition, or what-not connected with the Ellerbie family,” remarked Mr. Hardwick.

“It is writ down in one of them old books,” said Pease, glancing round at the book-shelves.

“I would not touch them for the world.”

“No more would I.”

“I will take the affair from your own lips.”

“Well, you see, it is a matter that’s no secret, and lordship himself has more nor once spoke of it; but you surely must know all about it, sir, by your leave?”

“I confess I have heard some fable or other, but I have paid no attention to it; there are traditions and legends in my own family, Pease, which I really could not remember at this moment.”

“You’d not forget this one, I think, if you was Lord Ellerbie; because, not to be disrespectful to lordship, he be pretty old now, and you are not, and you are of a more thoughtful habit, I should fancy; but, when my lord be a-talking again Master Philip Scruton gettin’ murdered and such like, as if he was of no account, I feel sorry as he should do it. For why? By your leave, this is for why. It be written in family history of the Ellerbies that race should die out, and it is all

owing to a crime as was done again the Church some way. The last of family was ordained to come to a bad end, being slain either by his own hand or by assassins. There is many circumstances, Master Hardwick, which Father Busby calls to mind as favouring the conclusion that the Ellerbie days is numbered. It was said in the history that one sign should be as last lordship should neglect church, should deny it; which my Lord Ellerbie have not exactly done, but he do border on it, no doubt by reason of times we live in not bein' comfortable like for Catholics; and you see there only stands between him bein' the last of race, this Master Philip Scruton, whose life, they say, is not worth a year's purchase, by reason of his reprobate ways and his quarrelling propensities and the like; though Father Busby says he is a good Catholic and strict when opportunity

offers, and all this to my thinkin' points to interest Lord Ellerbie have in Master Scruton living, which be his only chance of avoiding the fate as awaits last of the grand old family."

Mr. Pease heaved a deep sigh as he concluded his story, and Mr. Hardwick looked at him reflectively.

"But supposing Lord Ellerbie married again?" he remarked, presently.

"What's the good of that?" rejoined Pease, with a sneer; "he's been married enough already to have burdened the succession with half a dozen different sets of claimants."

Mr. Pease summed up the situation with a loud guffaw.

"I will now retire, Mr. Pease," said Mr. Hardwick, solemnly; whereupon the butler's hilarity fell to zero.

"By your leave," he said, "old Margaret

is waiting to show you to your room. I wish you a good night, sir."

Mr. Hardwick bowed stiffly, and tried to walk firmly, and made rather a ridiculous exit, for the floor was polished. But Mr. Pease assisted his master's guest upon his legs with a courtly and gracious "by your leave," as if slipping on your back was the most natural way possible to quit the room, and indeed as if it had been endorsed by warrant of fashion and custom from time immemorial.

CHAPTER V.

THE SHADOW OF THE GALLOWS.

Misfortune does not always wait on vice,
Nor is success the constant guest of virtue.

HAVARD.

SUSAN HARDWICK visited Grassmoor much sooner than she expected to do; the reason was Mary Kirk's trouble.

Jacob Marks stood in the direst peril; and Mary Kirk, woman-like, had selected the hour of his degradation to confess her love for him.

It was in the dead calm summer time, when Grassmoor looked like a dream of

old English life. A long straggling street of stone houses, with lichens on the thatched roofs, responding to the sunshine with a blaze of gold and brown, and green and yellow. The smoke of the chimneys crept out of the square stacks in lazy columns, broken by overhanging trees. In front of the open door, which showed you bright brick floors, white dressers, and shining tins, were straggling gardens, thick with old-fashioned flowers. Where they finished, in an uneven hedge by the roadside, trickled a rivulet that presently fell over a few boulders, and made a pool in which you could see the sky, like patches of blue among the trees.

Away down in the hollow, a grey and green spot in the landscape, with a flashing fane that looked like a golden butterfly, was Brackenbury Towers. To the right, as you passed down the village

street, a little distance from the road side, from which it was entered by a pair of white gates, was the Home Farm.

On this calm summer day, Grassmoor was agitated quite out of keeping with the general appearance of things. Groups of villagers were standing about engaged in serious conversation. They now and then looked towards the farm, and then down the road to where the dry arches of the old bridge could be seen, and the branch of the highway that led to Short's mill and roadside tavern, known as the Miller and his Men. They were talking of Jacob Marks and Mary Kirk. All the village was occupied with them. In regard to one of these persons half the county was full of active interest. Jacob Marks had been tried and condemned to death for highway robbery. He had the reputation, where he was best known, of

being the highwayman who had made the roads between Derby and Chesterfield and Chesterfield and Bakewell notoriously unsafe. Since his arrest for the affair near the old bridge, there had not been a single alarming incident along all the neighbouring highways. Counsel who had conducted the case against him fired the popular imagination with a belief in the almost ubiquitous character of this young criminal, and lovers of the romantic made a hero of him. Those who knew him had implicit faith in his innocence, and, when asked what he had to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon him, there was something touchingly pathetic in the calm, solemn way in which he lifted up his handsome face before the court, and said, "Only that I am innocent, my lord!"

It must be admitted that the evidence

was strongly presumptive of his guilt. His kind old moral master, the surviving partner in the firm of Marks and Short, confessed that he had often suspected the boy. This was dragged out of him in cross-examination by "the clever young barrister" who had been retained to defend the prisoner. Mr. Short was constrained to say that he often thought his cob very tired and stiff in a morning, and the inference was that he had been ridden at night unknown to his master. Both the Hon. Philip Scruton and the King's officer told the story with which the reader is acquainted, and a further sum of money had been found buried under the floor in Jacob's bed-room.

Moreover, justice wanted a victim. It was necessary that an example should be made. There had been too many highway robberies of late. Somebody must be

hanged. Jacob Marks was unfortunate in being captured at this period of popular excitement; and still more unlucky in being born in "the good old days when George the Third was king." If any of my readers should have the slightest difficulty in believing that this poor young fellow was convicted on the evidence which is before them, they can turn to his case in the Newgate Calendar. This episode of our general narrative is no imaginary one. The tragedy is as true in its earlier scenes as is the sequel, which belongs to a later period of the history of the several persons whose careers make up this present drama of love and adventure, of life and death.

Jacob Marks, the selected of Mary Kirk's two lovers, was condemned to die. The devoted girl and her father had sat in court and heard the sentence pronounced. They had brought Mary home utterly

stunned and helpless. She had seen him and embraced him, but all in a kind of dream. Her nature was not heroic. She had not proposed to go and fling herself at the feet of the King and beg her lover's life. It had never occurred to her to set forth and help by her tears to swell the great names which were being appended to a petition in his favour. She was a weak, loving, gentle girl, and she had fallen, as it were, prone upon her face under the blow she had received.

Susan Hardwick had come to her from the Hall; and on this summer day, with the scent of roses and hayfields, and the distant tinkle of sheep-bells, coming in at the open window, she sat with Mark Kirk's head upon her shoulder, and her arm round her waist. The country girl looked wistfully out over the lovely landscape, but saw it not; neither did she speak. Miss Hard-

wick talked to her; but the chattering companion who had amused her during that brief visit to Chesterfield was as dumb as Susan herself, when, a day or two previously, her father begged her to understand that he had other plans for her than a marriage with a hare-brained inventor. Mary's sisters and brothers occasionally peeped in at the open door, wondering at Mary's stillness, and her mother went in now and then and cried over her.

Old Kirk had gone to London with a lawyer, to try to influence the Lord-lieutenant and other distinguished county men in favour of a reprieve for the lad whom his daughter would have married; though he owned his choice for her would have been Tom Bertram. The Earl of Ellerbie had written to Lord Sidmouth pleading for Jacob's life as a personal matter; and Susan Hardwick begged her village friend

to be reconciled. "For," said she, "the innocent always triumph in the end." The criminal records of every country testify to the strange exceptions that must, as commendation of judicial wisdom, be taken to prove the rule.

There was one other person with whom the reader is already well acquainted who suffered intense mental agony at the painful situation which had cast a gloom over village and town. Tom Bertram loved Mary Kirk with an unselfish devotion that would have been content to see her happy even with his rival. The disappointment of her selection might have crushed all his hopes, have broken his heart, but he would have bowed to his fate with outward resignation. He was a strong, brave man, a frank, blunt young fellow, who would rarely be suspected of the capacity to feel much, to love deeply, or be greatly

moved by circumstances of pathetic interest. There are some tender, sensitive natures which veil themselves under a rough manner, a pretence of hardness and impracticability.

"You see, miss," said Tom, "I wanted to have it from your own lips that she is no worse."

He had intercepted Miss Hardwick in the short evening walk she took for reflection and exercise, while Mrs. Kirk put her daughter to bed.

"Indeed I think she is a little better," said the town young lady.

"Sorry to trouble you, but I wouldn't like to ask anybody else, and I'm going to Derby to see if anything can be done; some of my family live there."

Tom had taken off his hat, and he was swinging it in an apologetic way as he talked.

"You are very fond of Mary?" said Miss Hardwick.

"We all are hereabouts."

"That young man was your rival?"

"I couldn't blame a chap for getting better of me in that; he never did in any other way."

"You believe in his innocence?"

"I'm sure he is not guilty."

"Would you like to see Mary? It might do her good."

"No; it would do her harm."

"Why?"

"Bless your heart, miss, she would never bear to look on me, I'm certain of that. And I don't think I could stand sight of her myself."

His voice trembled, and he turned away his head.

"Something must be done to rouse her ;

she may go mad else," said Miss Hardwick, anxiously.

"Nothing will cure her but Jacob Mark's release. Do you think there is any way of getting a substitute for him?"

"Would you take his place?"

"Well, it sounds like bragging to say I would; but I *would*, for all that."

"I believe you, Tom Bertram; give me your hand!"

"Nay, it's too big and rough for the likes of you; we are not used to fine ladies at Grassmoor."

"You are used to brave and honest men, and that's better," said Susan; "there's my hand, then."

Tom Bertram took the little white hand in his, and pressed it respectfully.

"You love her, that's enough for me," he said; "but I don't think you'd better

mention my name to her. Good night, miss ; God bless you—and her !”

Tom slipped away as abruptly as he had appeared, and, as Susan re-entered the house, she looked wistfully in the direction of Brackenbury Towers, with which her future was destined to be strangely linked.

CHAPTER VI.

A MARTYR TO CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.

What's this world? Thy school, O misery!
 Our only lesson is to learn to suffer,
 And he who knows not that was born for nothing.
 YOUNG.

THERE is in my possession a bundle of State papers connected with the Criminal Trials of England which tells a curious though sad story of human suffering and aristocratic influence. Among these documents are judges' notes, death warrants, petitions for mercy. The latter include formal appeals signed by many

persons, and the private letters of princes and nobles. The result of these interpositions for culprits are duly set forth. I notice that the simple, unaffected letters of heart-broken mothers and wives received little or no attention, and that even great lords were occasionally answered with stiff official curtness. But I also find that in the cases where prisoners obtained reprieves some powerful noble or politician was the chief petitioner.

Among the letters which were treated with apparent indifference is one from Lord Ellerbie, seeking to obtain a reprieve for Jacob Marks on the ground of the young man's previous good conduct, and the belief that what he had done was on a sudden impulse of temptation. Moreover, his lordship pointed out that his nephew, Mr. Scruton, solemnly swore that the person who robbed him appeared to

be much shorter in stature than the prisoner.

Mr. Kirk had written a private letter, full of touching references to his daughter, who had lain insensible for days, ever since the sentence, and who would surely die if the young man was hanged. The simple farmer hoped the robbery of a few guineas did not necessitate the sacrifice of two lives, both perhaps innocent; one certainly the most precious and sweet life in the world to him and to all the people in Grassmoor; the other many believed quite innocent of the crime for which a conviction had been obtained.

In this little packet of cruel history there is a haughty letter from Mr. Hardwick, referring to his ancient descent, speaking of imaginary claims he had upon the Government, and requesting consideration for the prisoner as a personal matter.

Then there is a long formal petition ; and, last of all, a private report from the Judge to the Home Secretary, which is not in favour of arresting judgment. The whole of the papers are tied together, and docketed with the fatal memorandum, "No reprieve."

And so it came to pass that one July day a mighty crowd possessed the capital town of Derbyshire to see the Majesty of the Law assert its power over innocence and virtue, mistaken by the Blind Woman for wickedness and crime. From the districts around Derby the crowd poured in all the day before the execution, and all the night. Coaches and vehicles of all kinds brought guests from Chesterfield, which has always shown a morbid kind of interest in deaths and funerals. Every point of vantage was occupied in presence of the scaffold, and the day was quite fes-

tive, though the crowd held its breath for a moment, and shuddered when the minion of the law drew the cruel bolt on the victim of "good Mr. Theophilus Short" and the foolish woman with the scales.

To die for truth's sake, a sacrifice to some grand principle, a saint at the stake, a philosopher battling with superstition, a soldier fighting the hallowed battle of liberty: this is martyrdom which has its divine compensation; but to die a felon's death, to be launched into eternity with the brand of thief upon your character, to leave behind you a blackened memory, and yet to be innocent, is a bitter martyrdom to error which might well induce the sceptical to question the justice of Heaven.

Many such victims to ignorance, superstition, fear, expediency, fraud, and false witness stand at the bar of Public Opinion for posthumous justice—many known by

name and reputation; a far greater number have gone down to nameless graves. Among these passed away Jacob Marks. They hanged him at Derby in presence of a jeering crowd.

“I die innocent,” were his last words, but the sun shone brightly as he said so, and within an hour the vagabond vendors of street literature were crying, “The last dying speech and confession of Jacob Marks, executed this day on the gallows tree for highway robbery, with a copy of verses written upon the melancholy occasion by his sweetheart, and some words of warning addressed by the unhappy culprit to his companions in crime and sorrow,” the whole one of those popular fictions of the time of which the presses of Derbyshire used to be peculiarly prolific.

Now, while the shadow of Tower Hill falling upon a house may ennoble it, the

grim finger of scorn is directed to the house which lies under the ban of the scaffold. Poor Jacob Marks had no relations to inherit the odium that attached to his name; but there was one person who mourned his fate with unqualified bitterness, and another in whose despair there was not one gleam of light.

“I shall never be good for naught again,” said Tom Bertram to Miss Hardwick at the end of this grim nine days’ wonder. “I think soldiering will be about my mark now.”

He was standing respectfully, swinging his felt hat, near Miss Hardwick, beneath the elms on the Hall lawn, where first we saw the proud mill-owner’s proud but lovely daughter. The kitten had grown into a cat, but it was still playing with a ball of silk or cotton that had fallen from some needlework in her lap.

She had just returned to this occupation as a rest from her thoughts. There was a pleasant monotony about the work which she said soothed and comforted her.

“In that case you might never see Mary Kirk again,” said Miss Hardwick, in her incisive manner.

“All the better for Mary, poor soul, all the worse for me. Even the old man, God bless him, he agrees with me a-thinkin’ that if she see’d me she’d only be reminded of him as is gone, him as they’ve murdered.”

“But if she recovered from the first shock of these thoughts she might grow to like you, and who knows what might happen, Tom?”

“Nay, I don’t know; I should feel like an impostor; as if I’d slipped into dead man’s shoes, and, though he did get the

best of me with the lass, I loved Jacob ; I'd have died for him."

Tom turned his head and pretended Miss Hardwick had dropped the silk spool, which he restored to her basket, the cat watching this interference with its amusement with surprise, if not contempt.

"Yes ; I believe you made some offer of the kind to the governor of the prison ?" said Miss Hardwick, smiling, and quietly dropping again the ball, which the cat pretended was a mouse or even a rat, darting upon it, and seizing it with feline rapidity.

"Oh, I don't know what I said, miss, but I shall never be the same man again—never ! Of course it is not for the likes of you, a fine lady, to understand what us common chaps feel ; you see we've only got a limited space of folk and things to fix our hearts and minds on ; mine was

just riveted on Grassmoor, Mary Kirk, and Jacob, and there I was out of luck, for Jacob his was fixed on Mary, and, what was more, hers on him. I used to wonder if they ever got married whether I could stand it; and I think I could. I believe I could have gone on worshipping the ground she walked on, and only taking it out of him by beating him now and again at throwing the hammer, or quoits, or in a bit of rough steeple-chasing like; and, lord, if it would bring him back, poor chap, he might win everything in future, and I'm mad with myself now as I ever headed him once."

Tom paused as if impatient with himself and his own reflections.

"How it is I get a-talking with you like this I don't know. Seems as if I was just gabbing to myself when I'm talking to

you. It's a way you've gotten, making a chap so much at home and equal like, and yet not equal. I've never talked to my own mother as I do to you, Miss Hardwick."

"You pay me a high compliment, Tom; some day you will be telling Mary all about this visit to me."

"Nay, never, Miss Hardwick! I reckon I'll be like Billy Nipper's horse as he bought from Brewery, I'll have to think of clover I used to get, while I try to make chopped straw go down. My time has come and gone, miss. I'm like a race-horse as is lamed and gotten to be turned out; lamed in my mind like, not exactly my limbs, you know, but kind of unsettled and daft in my head. Bless you, I cannot work nor do naught, and so I shall just tak' King's shillin' and see foreign countries."

“And yet you think Jacob Marks was innocent?”

“I know he was, as innocent as I am of the thing.”

“Wouldn't it be better to devote your life to proving his innocence than going out to kill men you have never seen?”

“What's the good of that when poor chap's dead; and as for them foreign thieves, Miss Hardwick, why, aren't they ruining the country, and don't that Frenchman say he'll conquer England just as he's done the Continent?”

“Who do you suspect robbed Mr. Scruton?” asked Miss Hardwick.

“Well, to be plain, I said Short himself, but Mr. Kirk, though he hates Short, said that showed as I'd gone mad; a man noted for his religion and fairness, and, as everybody noticed, how sorry he was to give his evidence.”

“What makes you think he did it?”

“He’s so sly; and he always seems to be watching you when you’re not looking at him; and he’s always catching you up like; and he couldn’t abide Jacob, although Jacob always spoke well of him; and—well, there, I don’t know why I think he could be a highwayman; for same reason, I suppose, as anybody could have thought Jacob Marks was.”

“Murder will out, they say, Mr. Bertram; we shall see. I don’t think great wrongs go unpunished in this world, but one never knows; it is a mystery altogether, and I expect our duty is to take it as it is and not murmur; to do what appears to us to be our duty, and not to let our feelings and sentiments interfere too much with our calm judgment about what is best not only for ourselves but for others.”

"Certainly, miss; that is just about what I was thinking, though I couldn't express it like."

"We think we are shaping our own destinies," she went on, as if speaking to herself, "giving our hands where we love and shaping our future, forgetting all the time that it is already planned without us; that we are simply a pawn, or a knight, or a bishop, as the case may be, and that Fate is the player who moves the pieces."

Then, suddenly looking up, she exclaimed with animation,

"Who knows, Tom Bertram, with your instinctive feeling about this pious Mr. Short, but that you may be destined to hold him in check and win the game! That may be one of Fate's problems; a pawn, you know, may hold a king in check, with assistance may even cry checkmate."

“It’s a game I don’t understand,” said Tom.

“But if you are going to be a soldier, that makes a difference. Now if you had made up your mind to remain, and watch, and wait, to devote yourself to the work of running down the traitor, whoever he is, and washing white the memory of your friend, with Mary Kirk as the reward, then there might be some prospect of our hopes being fulfilled. That would be helping Fate.”

“Ah, Miss Hardwick, I’m too much of a waster for that. If I was to be loafing about in that way, I should soon end like Dicky Newbott, who died in the asylum of drink. Do you know, miss, I’ve had that feeling on me of late as they say leads to being a drunkard. It seemed as if it were a comfort like to sit and smoke and drink,

sitting on a bench by a roadside inn all day and at night on the settle in the tap-room; and getting up next morning, and only wanting beer and perhaps a sup of gin in it for breakfast. No, I am not made of the stuff you think, miss; but I'll sleep on it, I'll give it a thought when I am by myself, though I reckon to be going on suspecting and that, and being about, as it were, with a mission of that kind I should just get a fit on me and kill the chap, and there might be more hanging."

"I believe you are right, and I am wrong. Fate plays its games of chess so strangely that it may have intended you for a knight, and there is no knowing where it may move that other piece which you are to checkmate."

"Mr. Kirk says it's Providence; that Mary was too fond of ribbons, and put her affections above her Creator—didn't

humble herself enough like, and keep Sabbath holy all the time; and that it's a punishment—'whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth,' as the saying goes," said Tom.

"Do you think the Lord would go out of his way to be cruel to that poor, dear, pretty, simple-hearted girl?" rejoined Miss Hardwick, gathering up her work and rising to her feet.

"No, I can't think as He would; yet he has, you see, miss. How do you account for that?"

"I don't believe the Lord had anything to do with it. I don't think He would be mixed up in such an affair. God is good and great, and there is nothing good or great in killing a boy, and breaking a girl's heart, because a drunken scoundrel has been robbed."

"Ah, now you've got beyond me, miss, not to say astonished me, to hear a pretty

loving-like lady as you are, begging your pardon, talking like that."

"Well, I will not shock you any further," she said; "come into the house, and they shall give you some dinner before you go; when you have finished, ask to see me. I have something else to say to you besides good-bye."

The same thought as that which struck Tom Bertram concerning Mary Kirk might have occurred to you had you seen her dark, handsome, tender-looking, thoughtful face, and her graceful feminine figure; such a contrast to the gleams of masculine intellect which occasionally illumined her conversation and tinged her actions! She was a curious compound of the best qualities of heart and head, with somewhat erratic views of duty and independence of character, and opinion about the rights of blood, which ill accorded with her liberal

ideas on secular and religious questions. Her father possessed a much stronger influence over her than she would have been willing to admit on being questioned upon the subject. Her mother, when she died, begged her never to thwart her father, always to remember that the performance of duty which involves sacrifices is a higher attribute and a nobler than what the world calls love between the sexes. Mrs. Hardwick had died when Susan was at the impressionable age of sixteen, and the girl had been brought up in a peculiar school of scepticism, keeping up appearances, and resentment at the necessity of a continual and persistent economy.

After a little time, there was a knock at Susan's door. She had been sitting at her bed-room window, looking out upon the moulting elms (which were dropping

the first brown leaves of autumn on the green sward), and listening to the distant hum of the silk factory in the meadows beyond. She would not have sat so quietly if she could have heard what was going on at the mill, where mutiny and resistance were discussing plans of action.

“Tell him to wait in the library.”

Tom had not long to wait.

“One day, at a bazaar in the Chesterfield May-fair, Mary Kirk bought this bracelet, and gave it to me as a keepsake. It is of no value; they called it gold, but it is good honest brass, and will perhaps wear the better for that. I have had it beaten out, until I think it will fit you. It is not the sort of thing a man might select to wear; but it belonged to her and to me—wear it for her sake and mine. I have had her name and yours engraven upon it.”

He took it with a trembling hand.

“That’s the nearest we shall ever get to each other, to be written down together, and it’s like your kind heart to do that much.”

“Let that bracelet be a talisman to you, a talisman of hope and courage. If you are good and brave and true, you may yet live to avenge your friend, and console Mary Kirk with the honest love of a husband.”

“God bless you!” exclaimed Tom. “I know you mean it. Good-bye. If I stop any longer I shall make a fool of myself. Good-bye!”

He had kissed her hand through his blinding tears, and was gone before she she could say another word.

CHAPTER VII.

SHADOWS FALL ON OLIVER AND SUSAN.

Everyone is as God made him, and oftentimes a great deal worse.

CERVANTES.

WHILE Miss Hardwick was talking to Mary Kirk's despairing lover, her father had been discussing her future, and other important matters, with Oliver North.

It was in the young inventor's own room at the mill, where Mr. Hardwick had chosen to have his encounter with Oliver. A small room, with a bow-window of diamond-shaped glass and leaden frame, it was scat-

tered about with designs of various kinds, and bits of mechanical models. There was a chair near the window, while sitting in which you could see a number of old-fashioned cottage-gardens, with fruit-trees of pippins and pears, and beyond a fringe of poplar-trees, through which came the music of a distant brook.

Oliver looked picturesque in the velvet coat which he wore about the factory, and there was a dreamy expression in his long and somewhat ascetic face, as he turned to meet the sophisms and politic arguments of Mr. Hardwick, about the trade troubles which had come to a head at the mill.

“I do not care about the future,” said Mr. Hardwick, in his sharp, incisive fashion, clipping his words as they fell sharply from his thin lips, “except so far as my daughter is concerned, and my

honour. It is the present, sir, in which we live."

Mr. Hardwick walked about the room, taking a pinch of snuff now and then, and emphasizing his words with his crutch-stick. Oliver North sat still and looked at him, occasionally pushing his long brown hair away from his forehead, but with little other action. He was not exactly like a rock, against which the more excitable man dashed himself, but there was a certain amount of obstructiveness and immovability about him and his manner, which Mr. Hardwick found hard to bear.

"I tell you, sir, they may tear the mill down, if they like, and the sooner the better, the ungrateful vagabonds, the miserable *canaille*!"

"Why don't you say that to their faces?"

“Because I don’t choose to have a brick flung at my head ; and because I am independent of them. Yes, sir, you may express your disbelief in what I say by shrugging your shoulders. I repeat it, sir, because I can do without them and the mill too ; because, sir, at last I see my way to live without the taint of trade and the disgusting and damnable worry of it. I *will* do without it, too.”

“I am sure I can have no objection to that, sir.”

“I am not so sure, I am not so sure,” said Mr. Hardwick ; “you have somehow obtained such a hold upon the mill and the Hall too that I feel quite doubtful whether you may not have the audacity to feel dissatisfied with my plans, even to oppose them. You are one of those young men who by degrees, slowly and unperceived, as it were, make their way to high

positions and to places of power, and what not, and what not."

Mr. Hardwick felt that "what not" was rather a weak finish to what he had intended to be a comprehensive sketch of North's ambition, and it fretted him to see the young man smile.

"When I know what your plans are I will tell you whether you over-estimate my audacity or not."

"Very well, sir; then I will play my ace first; you shall see my hand at once; we will have no more subterfuge about it. My daughter is going to marry Lord Ellerbie."

Oliver turned pale, half rose from his seat, then sank back into the chair and said never a word.

"It will be a commingling of ancient blood and lineage, a joining of family names and honours, which will meet with the approval of all who belong to the

higher classes of society," went on Mr. Hardwick, glibly, now that he had played his ace, as he called it. "My daughter will marry a title, and she will have wealth enough to administer to those proper tastes which belong to noble birth and aristocratic ambition."

"Stop a moment," said Oliver; "don't talk, sit down, do anything, but don't talk."

The young fellow waved his hand, and sighed as if he was in pain.

"For God's sake, when you have stabbed a man to the heart don't turn the knife round and round," he said, clutching the chair; "give me time to breathe a moment."

Then he got up and suddenly walked to and fro.

"Did she tell you to come and say this?"

"Yes."

"I'll not believe it."

“I thought as much.”

“I’ll not believe it!”

“Do you wish to insult me?”

“Yes! If you were not her father I’d wish to kill you, you heartless hypocrite!” exclaimed Oliver, drawing himself up to his full height and contemplating the old man.

“Good morning, Mr. North,” said the mill-owner, turning away.

Oliver went to the door and locked it.

“No, sir; we’ll have this out now, once for all. I have seen it coming, long since; let it come. Sit down; deliver out your judgment and sentence; let us have it all, and have done with it.”

“By all means, if you engage that there shall be no violence, no pot-house brawling, sir; I am not accustomed to that kind of argument. The class from which you sprung too often mistakes violence for logic.”

“The class from which I sprung, Mr. Hardwick, does not sell its women; the class from which I sprang has only one stain on its poor plain escutcheon, that it lets itself be ruled by beggars on horse-back, and roués in tie-wigs.”

“In preference to inventors, who want to turn them into mere machine-minders, and who rob them of their honest labour,” answered Hardwick venomously, having overcome his fear of an assault.

“Well, well; it is only ignorance from which they are suffering anyway, not greed and lust and educated vice. But we will bandy no more compliments. You are the master here; go on. I will be as calm as I can.”

He sat down again in his chair, and resumed his former passive attitude. Hardwick walked about in a fidgety nervous way, turning his head

quickly to see the effect of his words, pursing up his lips and showing other signs of his mental trouble, and the weak arrogance of his nature.

"The day is fixed for my daughter's marriage," he began again.

"Go on to the next busines," said Oliver, calmly; but, before the mill-owner could reply, there was a tramp of feet outside the door and a loud rude knocking.

"Come in," said Oliver.

The door was locked. A rough hand shook it. Oliver opened it. A dozen men entered, half of them persons employed in the mill, the other half men who had been dishcarged, partly through depressed trade, partly owing to North's inventions having increased production with decreased hands.

"Well?" was all Mr. North said.

"We're a depitation," said Mike Busby, a notorious agitator and loafer.

“ Yes?”

“ We want our rights.”

“ You should address yourselves to Mr. Hardwick,” said Oliver.

“ No, no, not to me,” said the mill-owner, turning to the men, “ this young man has become my master, just as he has become yours, but I am quite willing to discharge him, if it is your wish.”

“ You coward!” exclaimed North.

“ Damn it, lad, he always was a coward!” rejoined one of the discharged mill-hands, “ and will be to the end; but that is not what’s matter. You’ve ’abled him to keep mill on at profit, with new-fangled machines and things, and we’n come to smash ’em all. That’s long and short of it.”

“ Have you? And do you think that will do any good? Do you think the brains which have made one set of

machines can't model and make another?"

"Maybe," replied the man, "but it takes time, and we'n just made up our minds to wipe 'em out; and we want you just quietly to give up drawings and things here first."

"The only drawings you will get here," said Oliver North, opening a desk and taking out a pair of pistols, "are these, and the first among you that moves is a dead man!"

Desperate men as they were, they shrank back before the heroic young fellow.

"Now listen," he said. "I'm willing to talk this thing out with you, and just at this moment I'd as lief you smashed everything in the place as not; but I'll not be bullied, and on principle I'll defend my property to the death."

"Hear, hear," said the man, who had

been the chief spokesman, "he's a right pluck'd un ; let's hear him."

"Ay, ay," said another, "put thy pistols away, lad ; thou'rt one of oursens, after all. Let's hear what's gotten to say."

"You have heard Mr. Hardwick say he is willing to discharge me."

"Ay, ay."

"Well, I discharge myself."

"It isn't thee we object to ; it's thy cursed inventing things."

"Listen !"

"Well, put thy pistols down."

He flung them aside carelessly.

"The object for which I have been working in the present no longer exists. Next to that, I have been thinking of a far-distant future, when your sons and grandsons will read, with shame and surprise, of the obstacles which

you laid in the way of mechanical progress. The only prospect for the greatness of this country lies in the perfection of such machines as these I have projected, and the time will come when the working men of England, in their happy cottages, all through these Midland counties, will bless the memories of the men you now curse and persecute. But I've done with it. I am no longer Mr. Hardwick's foreman. These things which I would not allow you to take from me by force have been made in his time and are rightly his; if he doesn't care to defend them, I am content to have done so when I had a lawful share in them. But I tell you that it is no good smashing the models and drawings without you kill me, for one day I will build a mill that will work by itself."

A loud laugh greeted this threat.

“A mill that shall be wound up like an eight-day clock, and the only hands will be labourers to gather up the product.”

“Thou’rt daft,” said Mike Busby, “we donnat care about what tha *will* do, it’s what tha *has* done. Will tha chuck out new machines and take back men you’ve turned off?”

“Ask Mr. Hardwick; I am now among the discharged.”

“Yes, I will, certainly,” said Mr. Hardwick.

“Then we’ll mak’ our apologies for this intrusion, and wish you a good day.”

And so the affair might have ended, had the business rested with the Chesterfield hands only; but at night there arrived in the town, from Nottingham and Derby, leaders of an organisation of lawless men, that a few years later issued its mandates under the *nom de guerre* of Captain Ludd,

and carried terror and destruction far and near throughout the Northern and Midland counties. When the old town, with its red-tiled roofs, its thatched houses, and its strange, uncanny-looking steeple was fast asleep, mysterious figures appeared in the meadows and gardens about Hardwick's mill. The few watchmen of the neighbourhood, who gave timely notice of their whereabouts by crying the hour, were easily gagged and carried to places of safety. And it was not until the flames of the wrecked mill illuminated the windows of the Hall, and the sound of military bugles was echoing the "assembly" through the street, that Mr. Hardwick and his daughter knew what had happened. It was too late for troops or water to be of any service. The rioters dispersed almost as mysteriously as they came, and, as they had no enmity against the only other mill

in the town, they had accomplished their mission. It was now so much the more easy for Mr. Hardwick to make overtures to his daughter in favour of Lord Ellerbie, which he commenced with a fierce persistency the next day.

“And he resigned in the midst of the trouble?” she asked.

“He did.”

“Gave up and went his way, and left the mill to be burnt without raising a hand in defence even of his own inventions?”

“Just so.”

“If anyone else had told me I would not have believed it. But he shall tell me himself; perhaps you do not see the situation with his eyes, father?”

“I tell you exactly what happened, and, further, that we are ruined.”

“You have warned me to look for that calamity before,” she said; “indeed our

lives for the past three years have been a miserable progress to this goal of humiliation."

"But I show you a new path, a way out of it, a road to wealth and titles, to rank and luxury; a way to revive the glories of our ancestry," said the old man, his voice trembling, his hands stretched out towards her.

"To marry Lord Ellerbie," she said, slowly, not mockingly, but as if calculating the weight of such a sacrifice.

"You wouldn't see me a bankrupt, a beggar, the butt of this wretched hole, this town that ought to be at our feet, and that may be yet, Susan—my child, my hope, my darling!"

"Is that the alternative? Is there no other way out of the difficulty? Cannot the mill be rebuilt? Have we no friends?"

Will Lord Ellerbie help you only as my husband?"

"On no other condition! Why should you hesitate? You have no other prospects; no other offer, I may say; that traitor, North, has not had the audacity to speak to you of love."

"Do not call him names, father; rely upon it that will not save you, and you must not try to force me into this match with a man whom I could not only never love, but whom I could not even respect. Have you spoken on this subject to anyone except Lord Ellerbie?"

"Well," said her father, "I referred to it in my conversation with North."

"What did you say?" she asked, the blood rushing into her face.

"That Lord Ellerbie had made you an offer."

“No more? Father, deal fairly with me. Don’t let me think that the honour of our house and the word of a Hardwick are figures of speech.”

“I told him you were going to marry Lord Ellerbie,” he said, pausing in his shuffle about the room, and looking at her with a truculent air of defiance; “I told him that you would be the next Countess of Ellerbie.”

“Then you forgot what is due to my honour and your own, and you did not speak the truth,” she replied, her face livid, her lips colourless, only the next moment to be flushed red as an angry sunset.

“Susan!” exclaimed old Hardwick, “my child, my only daughter!”

“Yes; I am your only daughter, but not your only chattel, father; sell the chairs and tables first, and then when you must

sell your flesh and blood speak to me again !”

She swept out of the room and left the door swinging behind her.

“The very sentiment that scoundrel uttered yesterday,” said Hardwick, taking a capacious pinch of snuff, “almost his words ; this comes of letting the lower classes into sufficient intimacy with the upper to exchange views with each other. But I once thought there was a fortune in that invention of his ; it’s my own fault. I ought to have known better.”

Then, going to the foot of the stairs up which Miss Hardwick had disappeared, he called, “Susan, love ; Susan, my dear ; just one word.”

But her door closed as he spoke, and he could hear the lock turned. I wonder if his withered little selfish heart would have been moved if he could have heard her

sobs, when she sat there all alone, her face in her hands, as if she would hide the shame and humiliation even from the mirror that had so often reflected her looks of joy when she had gone to her room fresh from a conversation with Oliver North.

CHAPTER VIII.

CUPID'S RECRUITS AND THE KING'S.

O, how this spring of love resembleth
The uncertain glory of an April day ;
Which now shows all the beauty of the sun,
And, by-and-by, a cloud takes all away.

SHAKSPERE.

THE unconventional town of Chesterfield was not given to be much surprised at anything. It had taken its share in the business of fighting the French ; it had seen rioting and sacking of houses ; it had stared its full at the prisoners of war, some of whose writing on the glass of an out-house of the Angel was still to be

seen a few years ago, and some of whose blood mingles to-day with the harsher strain of the locality; it had seen the marching of troops *en route* for the Continent, and also on their way against civil risings at home. It thought nothing of a drunken fellow rolling about the streets; yet when Oliver North came reeling out of one public-house to go reeling into another all the town was agog with the news.

The gossips concluded that Oliver was overcome at losing his position in the mill; though a few of them guessed that Lord Ellerbie had "cut him out with Miss Hardwick." Jessie Burns said so, but rather in sorrow than in anger; and it was noticeable that Jessie had grown much quieter than usual lately, for the scandal-mongers had got hold of Jessie's name now, and they did not scruple to say ugly things about her flirtations with Mr. George,

otherwise Ensign Wingfield, who, between his military education in London and his numerous vacations spent at the Vicarage, had managed to spend a good deal of his time with Jessie.

It was even said that, on one occasion when Jessie went away on a visit to a distant relation in the north, during the previous autumn, a couple very much like herself and the vicar's son stayed together at a secluded hostelry in one of the Arcadian dales near Buxton. Indeed, an angler who was wont to fish the waters of the busy Wye, as it flashed under Chee Tor, and rested in pleasant pools now and then by Miller's Dale, had been heard to say, over his glass at the Angel, that, though he would not harm a living creature, the Mr. and Mrs. Smith who stopped at the Anglers' Arms, and only walked out at night, were Mr. Wingfield and the

coy but sharp-tongued little mistress of the Chesterfield Post Office.

Poor Jessie! It is not necessary that we should beat about the bush in a plain, straightforward story such as this is. It was all true, the seemingly cruel things that were said about her. She had been trying to satisfy her own conscience by finding flaws in the conduct of others, a common device of even wiser people than Jessie; and she had held her position so far by dint of her boldness and her clever, daring tongue. She loved George Wingfield with all her heart, and she had given herself up to him body and soul. A devil-may-care young fellow of the period, a jack-a-dandy, who prided himself upon his conquests with women, a boy trained for military service, and on the eve of joining his regiment in the field, he had only thought of Jessie Burns as a local prize, a

pleasant pastime. Yet his pretended love, the hopes he had excited, were her all; secret treasures, it is true, but one day to be proclaimed before all the town; one day, she was assured, to be authorized at the altar and announced by the ringing of the bells that swung high up in the crooked steeple. For he had always told her that he would marry her, and he had once even asked her to fix the day.

“And what will I do?” Jessie was saying to Mr. George Wingfield, on this autumn evening, long ago, in a shadowy corner of one of those passages at the bottom of the market-place which was cut off from the fields by the brook that ran merrily along through the meadows, “ay, but I’m a-weary this day!”

The autumn wind came sighing up from the fields, and the lamplighter was busy with the few oil-lamps that served in those

days to illumine the darkest points of the old square, or rather to make the darkness dimly visible.

“Oh, you will do very well, Jessie,” said the heartless young fellow. “I shall leave you a good purse, you know; and if your father turns you out, why, I have written to that kind old lady at Miller’s Dale, and you can stay there until I come home. Don’t cry, Jessie, you shall have a coach and post horses. I will do everything that a gentleman can.”

“There’s only one thing that a gentleman can do, George; but if ye cannot do it, it is not myself that will upbraid ye,” she answered, lapsing more and more into the musical dialect of her native hills, “and it was not for myself that I was sae troubled, but for my father and your own father, George; for who am I that it should matter what becomes of me?”

“Jessie, you are the best little woman in the world,” said George.

“Nay, I’m just the worst, and I do not wonder that ye feel ye cannot marry me now; ye, an officer of the King’s army, and me, just the daughter of your reverend father’s servant, Sandy Burns. Ay, but to think of our position in this town o’ Chesterfield, which will hoot me in the streets when they ken the sort o’ girl they’ve got among them, and me that held my head up till they were sae jealous it made them spiteful.”

Jessie was not one of your quiet folk, who take their troubles silently, and bend before the cruel wave of Fate without a word. Chesterfield always said her tongue would be her ruin; but they were wrong. It was the gift of beauty that was Jessie’s ruin; her bright eyes, her wavy red hair, her piquant manner, her graceful car-

riage, her melodious voice, her coquettish ribbons, her well-formed instep. If you read the literature of the period, the plays of the time, the ballads of Derbyshire which were sold in the market towns, you will find that to ruin such a girl as this was not considered a serious matter, more particularly if the transaction was a military one. Farquhar's "Recruiting Officer" did not over-colour the openly practised and accepted immorality of the army, and a troupe of players had recently delighted Chesterfield with a representation of the vulgar and outrageous amours of "Sergeant Kite" and "Captain Plume," which poor Jessie had witnessed from the boxes of the stuffy little theatre. That which was full of mirth to many was but a sad business to Jessie Burns.

"You shall be taken care of," said George. "I will put some money in the

bank for you, and I'll write to your father when we march, Jessie, and you must cheer up, and not be down-hearted."

"Ay, laddie, it's nae good your saying that; I'll jest never cheer up again, and ye ganging awa to fight, and me all alone, with naebody to say a kind word to me; the neighbours say I've got nae heart at all, but they do not know me. It's jest too much heart that's my trouble."

"'Pon my life, that is true, Jessie; you're too good, and there, I don't know what to say to you; I never felt as I do now, Jessie, ashamed of myself."

He might well say so, if there was a spark of manly feeling in him; for that very day he had solemnly engaged himself to his father's ward, Emily Manners, without the knowledge of the vicar; and standing here, under the stars, he began to be conscious of a divided sentiment in

regard to the two girls. There was something flattering to his vanity in Jessie's tender, self-sacrificing confidence, something fascinating in her musical voice, and the quaintness of the northern dialect. But Emily was a lady, and an heiress to boot, and Jessie—well, it did not bear thinking of!

“Nae, it is not you that should have any shame in the matter; there is only one person to blame, and that one person must bear the pain and all that follows; for it's sae ordained, and it is written that as you make your bed just so must ye lie in it. Ay, it's hard to part wi' ye. But the clock's striking nine, and my feyther will be wondering where I've gotten to.”

“Then I'll say good-bye, Jessie. Put this in your pocket.”

He pushed a purse into her hand.

“Nay, I'd rather not have it, George; it

maks me feel all the worse, somehow."

"You must, my child, you must," he said; "how are you going to manage else?"

"Oh, I dinna ken how, but I'll contrive to; Heaven will not desert me altogether."

"Jessie, I insist," said George, quite in his customary voice now, for he felt conscious of something like a good action.

"Vary weel, George dear, for your sake," she said, and put it into her pocket. "Ay, if the neighbours and townsfolk did but ken the sort of person the prou'd lassie o' the Post Office is; but I'll not think about it now. Kiss me, George; one kiss, the last, it may be, ye'll ever gie me; but ye'll think of me out there, when the bands are playing, and I'll pray for you in the battle, if the prayers of sich like as me are any gude."

"Good-bye, Jessie, my poor dear little

lassie, good-bye," he said, stooping to kiss her, and only then knowing that she had been talking all the time through blinding tears, talking as if her eyes were dry as his, but talking with her poor, brave, generous little heart breaking.

How was he, a fine young gentleman, the son of a distinguished father, an officer in a crack regiment, just going to put on his gay uniform for the first time, to understand the awful affliction that had come upon poor Jessie, who, having fallen through her unpardonable vanity and her deep love, was now awakening to that special misery which was not new when the poets told the story of "Marguerite," and which will never be old this side the millennium?

The drunken fellow who reeled in Jessie's way for a moment as George watched her going home was Oliver North, whom the

vicar's son had met occasionally in Chesterfield houses, and also once-in-a-way at the Angel. Oliver was one of the few intellectual young men of the town, and one of the few, not native and to the manner born, whom the townspeople looked up to, for they were a clannish and somewhat jealous community.

"Hollo, North!" exclaimed George, "what's the matter?"

"Nothing," said Oliver, pulling himself together.

"Where are you going?"

"To the Angel," said Oliver, speaking soberly, though he staggered in his gait.

"Come with me to the Horns; some of my fellows are having a supper there in honour of my commission and orders to march. I fancy it is the vicar's treat. We march, you know, either to-morrow or at the end of the week."

"I wish I did."

"Why, has the sacking of the mill so upset you? Surely old Hardwick can get money enough to build it up again?"

"He can't build me up," said Oliver.

"You want holding up, I'm afraid."

"Do you think I'm drunk?"

"I know you are," said George, bluntly, for he was brave enough with men, however cowardly he might be with women.

"Stand off!" said Oliver, thrusting him aside.

"Nonsense, you are all right in your head, dear friend, but you are drunk in your legs."

"Very well, then!" said Oliver, in a stupid sort of fashion, "you let my legs alone!"

"I will; but you shall take my arm," said George, seizing Oliver by the shoulder, "confound you, I'm your friend, and I

have been as you are myself, and hope to be again. Do you want to quarrel?"

"Yes, I do," said Oliver, shaking himself free of his companion; "I do want to quarrel, that's what I want to do."

"With whom?"

"Anybody, more particularly with myself," he said, staggering against a passer-by, who stopped with one or two others, in the hope of seeing a row.

"Come along, then; we'll quarrel as we walk," answered George, putting his strong right arm round Oliver, and carrying him along. "I'm your friend, North; I'll fight your battles, whatever they are."

"I have no friends," said Oliver, and as they passed under the light of a lamp his face could be seen pale and sad, his long hair straggling over his forehead. His figure was thin and somewhat delicate, his hands long, his manner dejected and worn.

George Wingfield was a striking contrast. Tall, athletic, straight, strongly built, he was the picture of a young English officer. Short, light hair, cut close to his head, a weak mouth, partially hidden by a light moustache, a prominent chin, and a somewhat sensual formation of the lower part of the face, which was neutralised by a frank manly look in the eyes. In the matter of strength he was a young Hercules, and there was a good deal of obstinacy in his composition, which was shown in some measure by the way in which he struggled with and overcame Oliver North.

“The fresh air will put you right,” he said, as Oliver for a moment ceased to resist him; “we’ll walk to the Horns, or, if you like, I’ll see you home.”

“I have no home.”

“You are in a bad way,” said George.

"Let me walk by myself."

"I won't."

"You shall."

"I won't, I tell you."

It was no use Oliver struggling, George Wingfield held him as if he were in a vice.

"If you like to put your head under this pump, and let me pump on it, you shall walk by yourself."

"Very well," said Oliver, who at once bared his head and submitted to the sobering process suggested by his friend.

"Do you feel better?"

"Yes; good night!" said Oliver, starting to run, but falling all his length in the road.

"Oh, you obstinate beggar!" said George picking him up.

"It's the first time I've been drunk," said Oliver, "and I am not used to it."

"You are ever so much better, though."

"How do you know?"

"Because you are ready to acknowledge what is the matter with you."

"Isn't this the Potters' Field?"

"Yes."

"Let us sit down, and rest a minute."

They entered the meadow through a stone stile. The Horns public-house was close by, a roadside inn, outside the borough.

"You will be all right in a minute."

"Leave me now," said Oliver; "I'm quite well."

"I won't leave you, and you are not quite well. There is something more than drink the matter with you."

"There is, there is," replied Oliver, bitterly; "don't ask me what it is, and I shall tell no lies about it. I'm done for."

"It's a woman," said George; "only a

woman could floor a fellow like you. You are not used to them."

"Well, yes, it is a woman."

"Tell me all about it, and relieve your mind; I feel devilish bad about a girl myself,—two or three girls for that matter."

"Then you would not understand me if I told you my case," said Oliver, rising to his feet, "so come along, I'll go with you to the Horns or anywhere else. I don't care. Fate and the devil may toss me where they please, since the angels will have nothing of me."

Oliver's misery had been completed a few hours previously by Susan Hardwick refusing to see him. He had called at the Hall to ask her himself whether it was true what her father had said. Meeting Mr. Hardwick on the steps, he unfortunately was in no mood to brook further insults from the arrogant and selfish old man, and

a noisy altercation had ensued, purposely provoked by Susan's father, because she was within hearing, and he hoped North would call him names, which Oliver in his wrath did, walking straight into the trap which had been set for him. In the midst of the altercation, and following up an almost ferocious epithet which Oliver had used towards her father, Susan presented herself, pale and indignant, for, even had she acknowledged to herself that her father had deserved Oliver's rough denunciation of him, her pride and her sense of filial duty would not let her stand by and hear him pronounced a cowardly, selfish, lying old man.

"If you have called upon *me*," she said, looking straight at Oliver, her lip quivering, "you may spare us this unseemly altercation. I refuse to see you."

That was all she had said. Oliver had

looked at her, with his heart in his mouth, as she turned her back upon him and retired. And then he had felt that all was really over. It was to recall this scene again now that he came to his senses. He had wandered aimlessly from the Hall to the Angel, had, indeed, gone straight-way and sought consolation or oblivion in drink, just as Tom Bertram had feared he might do himself, as he had told Miss Hardwick in that conversation about Mary Kirk and her dead and disgraced lover. Yet Tom, the rough, uncultivated villager, had only talked of drink as a danger he wished to avoid in his trouble; while Oliver North, the educated, sensitive, thoughtful inventor, who had conceived grand mechanical theories, and had seemed to be on the eve of realizing them, went straight down into the gutter, and for the moment was a mere helpless thing, like

a rudderless, water-logged ship at sea.

They were received with a wild burst of cheering at the Horns; the young officer and his friend, Mr. Oliver North.

The recruiting sergeant of the district was in the chair. He and the company rose and saluted Ensign Wingfield, and then the sergeant made a few remarks about the honour and glory of serving under officers who were gentlemen, and what a fine thing it was for the Chesterfield recruits to know that they might be led to victory by one of their own townsmen, the son of a fighting family, and as fine a young fellow as ever drew a sword or made a pretty girl's heart ache.

George Wingfield stopped the speaker at this point, and said, "Comrades, I have come here to-night to drink to the king, and to say that I am glad I have got my commission, because the sergeant who has

enlisted so many of my young fellow-townsmen wished me to pay you this visit, and also because I liked it, and feel it to be neighbourly. The regiment in which many of you here will serve, and to which I have been appointed, is ordered to the front."

"Hurrah!" shouted the men.

"We are going out in a good cause. Though Trafalgar settled Napoleon's navy, his continental power is unbroken, and he is going to strike us shopkeepers, as he calls us, through our pockets."

The company groaned and laughed ironically.

"The British Islands are declared to be in a state of blockade; our countrymen who happen to be in France and other countries under Bonaparte's control have been made prisoners; our merchandise has been confiscated. The result is dear bread

in England, trade paralysed, half the world arming against us, and Napoleon dictator over all the nations."

"Except England, your honour," said several voices.

"It is to except England, to maintain England's honour, to rescue our countrymen, and to prove ourselves worthy of our fathers that we are going out to fight bandits and traitors," said the young officer amidst deafening applause, "and here's to the king, to the regiment, and to the girls we leave behind us!"

He raised a tankard to his lips, and the entire company stood up and cheered with all their might, those being most noisy who had drunk most.

There was one big, handsome fellow, among half-a-dozen others out of uniform, sitting near the recruiting sergeant, who

responded to a call for a song, and who sang an old English ditty, the burden of which was love and war; but half way through he broke down, and was saved from utter discomfiture by a loud repetition of the chorus by the company. The vocalist was Tom Bertram, who had not failed from any weakness of memory, but on account of the strength of it and its inopportune exercise. All in a moment it had occurred to him that, while he was singing, Mary Kirk was weeping in that quiet sad house which used to be so sunny and bright at Grassmoor.

“Captain Wingfield,” he said, rising, “and, gentlemen, I beg your pardons for breaking down, I hope I’ll do better when it’s real work I’ve gotten before me, and, as it’s my turn to call for a song or a sentiment, I ask leave to mention Mr. Oliver North.”

“That man’s a born courtier, rough as he is,” said George, “calling me captain. Say something good to the fellow, Oliver.”

“I know him,” said Oliver, now pretty well himself again, and remembering the many gracious things Susan Hardwick had said about Tom, as well as his chivalrous conduct in connection with that terrible business at Derby, “he is a fine fellow, but what is he doing here?”

“He’s one of the sergeant’s latest recruits; don’t you see the ribbons which he has pinned upon his shoulder, as no other fellow’s are pinned. Damme, the fellow’s a perfect picture!”

“Gentlemen,” exclaimed Oliver, standing up, pale as a ghost, a wild light in his eyes, “Tom Bertram asks me for a sentiment, I don’t know one, I don’t think I ever was at a convivial meeting in my life before. But I know a man when I

see him ! Tom Bertram is a man, every inch of him."

"Bravo ; he is, he is," shouted a dozen voices.

"I'll put him into a sentiment for you, gentlemen, and give him a new comrade. 'May we all be worthy of Tom Bertram's friendship !' "

"Well said !" cried Tom's companions.

"And may the king have a million better soldiers than Oliver North ! Sergeant, give me the shilling."

Oliver stepped towards the recruiting officer.

"North, my friend," said George, "think what you are doing."

"I have thought," said Oliver ; and mumbling something about serving His Majesty the King, the sergeant deposited a shilling in Oliver North's open hand, and then hammering the table for silence, said:

“Ensign Wingfield and comrades, the sentiment is ‘May we all be worthy of private Bertram’s friendship!’ And may His Majesty have a million soldiers as handsome and plucky as the lads who have taken the King’s shilling in Chesterfield!”

“Hurrah!” and “Three cheers for the new recruit!” cried a score of voices, as the chairman fastened the colours in the hat of Oliver North.

BOOK II.

RECRUITED BY MARS.

They daily thrust their loves and lives through hazards,
And, fearless, for their countries' peace, march bravely
Through all the doors of death, and know the darkest :
What labour would these men neglect, what danger ?
Where honour sits, though seated on a billow
Rising as high as Heaven, would not these soldiers,
Like so many sea-gods, charge up to it ?

BEAUMONT.

CHAPTER I.

FATHER AND SON AND THE THREE RECRUITS.

The sea of fortune doth not ever flow ;
 She draws her favours to the lowest ebb ;
 Her tides have equal times to come and go ;
 Her loom doth weave the fine and coarsest web :
 No joy so great but runneth to an end ;
 No hap so hard but may in time amend.

SOUTHWELL.

THE Vicar of Chesterfield, the Reverend Normanby Wingfield, was looked upon as one of the most gentle, amiable, yet upright and manly parsons in the county.

He had commenced life in the army, and after an Indian campaign had taken orders,

and being already a rich man was quickly advanced to high preferment. The living of Chesterfield was of no great value, and he gave away ten times the amount of his stipend ; but there was a pleasant vicarage house, and he was fond of his native county, every inch of which he had explored and almost knew by heart. *The Gentleman's Magazine* contains the heads of a sermon which he preached on the beauties of Derbyshire, and the character which the people ought to maintain for all that is fine and noble in human nature, that they might show themselves worthy of the lovely region in which they had the good fortune to exist. It would be to study the subject too curiously to consider—in a novel, at all events—the influence of scenery on human character, but Vicar Wingfield thought Derbyshire men and women should find an incentive to virtue

and honesty and manliness in the loveliness of their hills and dales, their musical brooks, their verdant valleys, and their noble crags and peaks. In regard to the moral duties that belonged more particularly to gentle birth, he insisted upon a very high standard of conduct, and he found neither sympathy nor excuse for the social crime of which the Kites and Plumes of the army made a merit.

The vicar had an invalid wife, one only son, and a ward, Miss Emily Manners, a charge bequeathed to him by a widowed officer on the field of battle. Miss Manners was well endowed with property, and was of a sweet amiable disposition. She was not considered to be pretty, but she was accomplished, and Chesterfield called her "The Lady of the Vicarage." Unknown to the vicar, and with a suddenness that had surprised Miss Manners into an

encouragement of his pretensions, George Wingfield had proposed for Emily's hand. The vicar had other views for her, conceiving it to be a more honourable performance of his trust that she should not marry his son, than if her estates and herself remained in his family. Nor had he any notion that George and Emily regarded themselves as anything more to each other than friends. They had not been thrown much together. George had been away for his education and training, except during the usual vacations, at which times the vicar had artfully managed that she should visit his sister who lived at an old hall up in the Peak. Moreover, Miss Manners had, it was thought, rather encouraged the attentions of a certain Yorkshire baronet, whose pretensions were favoured by the vicar. George Wingfield was, however, a young fellow far more

desirable in appearance than the baronet, who looked as common as one of his own grooms. And so, somehow, George, on the receipt of marching orders, took advantage of the time and a sudden whim to attack Miss Manners by storm, and surprise her, if not into a confession of love, at least into a sort of understanding that supposing he continued in the same mind when he returned he might ask his father's consent to their marriage.

George Wingfield had been tempted into this latest complication almost through the badinage of his friends, who twitted him with letting a stranger carry off, under his very nose, "The Lady of the Vicarage," an heiress and a most desirable wife. He had argued that some day he would have to "settle down" as a respectable married man, and that at all events Emily Manners "might just as well be his wife as any

other; and better." At all events he thought there would be no harm in putting off the possibility of the baronet securing her hand until he had had time for reflection. The heartlessness of the business did not occur to him. He was thoroughly selfish about women. They were in his eyes simply intended to minister to the pleasures of young men, and to make old men comfortable. If he thought at all about it, that was his view ; but the chances are he did not think. His nature at present was a jumble of inconsistencies, his moral sense was a blank, his mind was only exercised in the interest of his personal pleasure and ambition. A splendid animal, his appetites might have been described as Epicurean, had they not included the robust ambition of military adventure and the pride of strength of limb.

The vicar's son had inherited from his father the youthful prowess and love of arms that had made him select a soldier's life, but little it is to be feared of that virtue which had led to the beating of his father's sword into a clerical crook and the living up to the profession which it symbolised.

There was a delicious air of quiet in the vicar's library at all times, but especially might this have been observed a day or two after George's parting with Jessie Burns, when the Scotch lassie's father sought audience with his reverence. Mr. Phœbus Jones, a quiet oldish man, dressed in a black livery, opened the old oak door gently and closed it softly behind him.

"What is it, Phœbus?" asked the white-haired, closely-shaven vicar, looking up from his desk; "we certainly must find another name for you."

“So you’ve said for the last fifteen years,” said Phœbus, in a subdued voice and with a soft southern accent.

“Yes, you are like Tristram Shandy’s door that he was always going to grease the hinges of ; but really I must think of a new name for you.”

“ ‘Thank you.’ ”

“But what is it ?”

“The sergeant wishes to see you, sir.”

“Burns ?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Anything wrong ? He does not often favour us with a call, Phœbus.”

“He looks as if something was wrong, sir.”

“Tell him to come in.”

“I will, sir,” answers the courteous and gentle servitor, striking his elbow against a high-backed chair as he turns to leave the room, and begging its pardon as if it

were a human being—"Beg pardon; yes, sir."

"Phœbus!" said the vicar to himself, "he's anything but bright. What respectable clergyman could have allowed him to be christened such a heathenish and foolish name."

"Beg pardon, sir; Sergeant Burns, the letter carrier," said Jones, ushering in a sandy-haired, freckled man, who, from appearances, might have been any age between forty and seventy; a reticent, rather stupid-looking fellow, yet still the father of that chatty, lively girl, whose tongue had been a sword in Chesterfield, and whose trouble would secretly rejoice many of the jealous townsfolk who cared neither for Northerners nor Southerners, and who regarded as interlopers all settlers in the old town that were not native and to the manner born.

“Well, where is he?” asked the vicar, as Phœbus stood with the door ajar.

“Eh, but the mats are vera sma’; I canna find one sufficient to wipe my feet on,” Burns could be heard saying to himself, in a coarse, grating voice.

“Beg pardon, sir,” said Jones, in his gentle, propitiating manner, as he looked into the passage leading to the room; “the sergeant is wiping his shoes with his pocket-handkerchief.”

“Come in, come in,” said the vicar, in a loud tone; and then, turning to Mr. Jones, “that will do, Phœbus; now, why couldn’t you have had a name like Burns?”

“Beg pardon, but that is his surname, sir; my surname is Jones.”

“Dear me, yes; why did I never think of that?” said the vicar, smiling; “in future then we will call you Jones.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Jones, turning

away, to come in contact with the awkward burly form of Burns.

“Beg pardon,” he said, and the next moment he closed the door and was gone.

“Anything wrong, Burns?” asked the vicar. Burns, standing cap in hand, by the vicar’s writing-table, which is placed in the centre of a bow-window that looks out upon a well-rolled lawn, bounded by clipped yew-trees, box-borders, and rose-bushes.

“Yes, sir.”

“At the post-office?”

“Weel, yes; it is at the post-office, in the hoose.”

“What is it, then?”

Burns looked at the vicar, and then at his cap.

“Have you lost something?”

“Something like it.”

“A robbery?”

“Ay, vicar, a robbery that naething can replace, and yet there’s a gift with it too, ye ken.”

“You are speaking in parables,” said the vicar; “when you have quite made up your mind, Burns, to take me into your confidence, I will listen to you, and help you if I can; as I always have done.”

“Ay, that’s it, colonel, I mean vicar; ye were always sae kind and gude, that’s why I feel I canna tell ye. I thought it my duty to come, and so I come, and now I have come I wish I hadna, and I think I’ll just gang back and keep my trouble to mysel. Only I canna do that, for the bairn will cry, and Chesterfield folk will talk.”

“Sit down, Burns; tell me what is the matter. I can see there is something really wrong. Does it concern me or you?”

“Baith o’ us, but me most; for if I were a bad mon it would cause me to greet, and it’s just because you’re a gude mon it will gie ye pain. Eh, but I’m vera sorry I come, I’ll gang hame again.”

“Sit down and speak out,” uttered in a peremptory tone, with more of the colonel in the manner of it than the vicar, pulls Burns up, and brings his right hand promptly to the salute.

“Now then, Sergeant Burns,” says his reverence, rising to his feet, “what is it?”

“It’s Jessie, it’s Jessie!” burst out from the trembling lips, and the strong Scotch soldier wipes the tears from his eyes with the back of his brown hand.

“What of Jessie?”

“She’s disgraced hersel, and me, and your reverence, and the town, and all o’ us.”

Burns sits down and hides his face in his cap.

“Poor child ! I guess what you mean. And who is the villain that has brought this misery about ?”

“Do you think he’s a villain ?”

“I do, indeed.”

“Then I’ll gang hame ! I said I wished I hadna come. I’ve nae right to mak ye unhappy.”

“It is my duty, as a clergyman, Burns, to share the troubles of my flock ; in your case there is a closer tie : we fought for our country side by side, and you carried me wounded from the field and under fire.”

“That was naething, vicar ; ye hae no right to mention it. Let me gang hame.”

“Who is the man—the villain ?”

“Ay, that’s it ; ye said he was a villain.”

“And I say so again. He’s a wretch, accursed of Heaven——”

“Nay, nay!” exclaims Burns; “dinna say that o’ your ain flesh and blood!”

“My own flesh and blood!” says the vicar, echoing Burns’s words, and passing his white hand over his forehead in a troubled manner. “You don’t mean George, you don’t mean my son?”

“You’ve said it, you’ve said it!” exclaimed Burns. “And I wish it wasna true.”

“George! my only boy! What have I done that I should be visited by this punishment? It will break his mother’s heart.”

“I wish I hadna come,” says Burns, in a sort of wail, like the chorus to some sad refrain, for there was a deep rich musical ring in the parson’s voice, a lamentation in the reflection of the effect of Burns’s

news on the poor suffering mother in the chamber above.

“It is right that you should come,” says the vicar, speaking as if addressing a congregation, so solemn and emphatic and eloquent are his words. “I wish you had had no cause to come, but, having the cause, you are in the right. Sergeant Burns, you are a maimed old soldier of the world; I a soldier of Christ. This sorrow binds us, we are brothers in adversity. You were only an old servant of mine yesterday; to-day we are brothers. Your foolish daughter and my wicked son have made us relations, Brother Burns; my son shall marry your daughter!”

“But, sir,” stammers Burns.

“There is no ‘but.’ It shall be done, or George Wingfield is no longer a son of mine. Good-bye!”

The vicar takes the half-resisting hand of the sergeant.

“He’ll nae do’t, he’ll nae do’t,” says the Scotchman, turning towards the door.

“Bröther! brother!” says the vicar, solemnly, “these foolish young people have made us brothers, without a thought of us. Will you leave me without a word?”

“I canna speak,” says Burns, going, “I canna speak; your ower kind words just choke me. I’ll gang hame, I’ll gang hame.”

“Thank Heaven it is a sin that can be repaired,” said the vicar by-and-by, speaking to himself, after sitting for some time looking out upon the lawn, his thoughts busy with the immediate reparation which George should make. “Jessie is a sweet girl. George is young, she is young, and both have been foolish and thoughtless.

It is useless and vain to look for ripe corn in the spring time. It may all be for the best. I will hope so. Family pride is a hollow mockery, a hollow vanity. I may learn to love my daughter Jessie, and even bless the folly of my son. And yet I fear I am but cheating myself. It is a bitter grief!"

George knocked at the door and entered at the moment.

"We march to-morrow, father, the orders have just come in," he said, pausing as suddenly as he had spoken, to notice how pale and agitated the vicar appeared to be.

"George, George!" exclaimed the vicar, his hand on his heart.

"Why, what's gone wrong, father?"

"Jessie Burns," said the vicar. "George, before you march you'll marry Sandy Burns's daughter."

George sighed aloud, partly in sympathy with his father's pain, partly out of relief that the worst had come to pass and was over.

"I cannot, father," he said.

"You cannot?"

"No, sir."

"And why?"

"For several reasons."

"Name one."

"You have always told me that men should marry in their station of life."

"When you wronged Jessie Burns you stooped to her level; you must try to lift her to yours."

"I cannot."

"Do not make me angry. Why cannot you?"

"You have told me men should only marry where they love."

“And do you dare to set that up as a reason after what has happened?”

“I have another reason,” said George, “a subject which I came in to speak about, one you will hear of now, I fear, with displeasure.”

“Well?”

“I am grieved to give you pain, but I hope you will make allowance for youth, and not think me too undutiful.”

“Well, sir?”

“Miss Manners,” said George, pulling himself together for his last plunge into the troubled waters of paternal displeasure.

“What of her?”

The vicar steadied himself by the aid of the chair by which he was standing, his hand resting upon the back.

“I am engaged to Emily,” said George.

“What?” said the vicar, sinking into his

chair and clasping the arms, as he looked at his son.

“It was yesterday that I spoke to her, only yesterday, and I am here to tell you of it, sir, and to say that if I should return from this war alive I shall ask your consent to our marriage.”

“And you shall never have it,” said the vicar, slowly, rising to ring the bell, which Phœbus answered at once.

“Don’t let the Sergeant go.”

“No, sir.”

“Send him here to me.”

“Yes, sir.”

“You must not think of Emily,” said the vicar, as Phœbus went out. “I cannot believe she has had proper time to think of what you may have said to her. Her father left her to my care, herself and her noble fortune. Had you been worthy of her I would even then have regretted

your marriage to her. But shall *I* hand over that sweet innocent girl to a reprobate, a seducer, a——”

The vicar did not complete his string of epithets ; for Burns was ushered in by Phœbus.

“Sit down, Sergeant,” said the vicar, rising, drawing himself up to his full height (a figure of clerical dignity, in the square coat and gaiters of the time), and turning from Burns to George. “Now you, son of mine, listen, as I speak to an old servant, servant no more. Sergeant Burns, you are not responsible for the sin of this bad young man, nor for the folly of your thoughtless daughter. We are bound together : your daughter is my daughter now, that young man is your son, if he behaves as an honourable man should. Now, sir, answer !”

George looked at the plebeian Scotch-

man, who had cleaned his boots when he was a boy, and who always touched his hat to him now that he was a man of two-and-twenty.

“You don’t generally joke on serious things, father; but I can’t think you are in earnest,” said the handsome young fellow.

“Answer me, will you marry Jessie Burns?”

“I am engaged to Emily,” said George, the vicar having only succeeded in exciting the lad’s obstinacy when he hoped to touch his manliness and good feeling.

“I promised her dead father to take charge of her. You respect me; would you still do so if I handed her over to you? Or have you lost all respect for me, and would you have me break my sacred trust to enrich a wicked and profligate son? You have chosen the daughter of my old servant. The surrogate will grant a

special licence, messengers shall be despatched at once ; name the hour, and I will marry you at her bedside."

"I am engaged to Emily," doggedly repeated George.

"Do not dare to utter the name of Miss Manners again to me ! Do the duty that is before you. I am your father, but I will take my orders from you. The regiment shall halt for you—when will you marry this man's daughter ?"

Burns moved to intervene between father and son, but was awed into silence by a glance from the vicar.

"I have said that I cannot marry her," said George, in a voice as firm and determined as his father's.

Whatever might have been the result of a coaxing and affectionate appeal to George Wingfield, the dictatorial method; the formal exercise of authority, the indignant

denunciatory style adopted by the vicar only roused the fighting qualities of the lad's nature, and put consideration for Jessie further and further in the background.

"You cannot! I say you shall!" exclaimed the vicar, raising his arm as if to have this declaration recorded as a command that must be obeyed.

"And I say," began George, as if responding to a challenge.

"Go on, if you dare to speak; you shall behave honestly, or quit my roof for ever. Do you hear?" said the vicar, his blood fairly up at last, the colour of anger in his cheeks, his right hand clenched.

"I do hear," said George, quietly, but emphatically. "You are firm and resolved, are you not, father?"

"Yes."

"And I am your son," said the young

man. "I am firm ; you have told me to quit your roof. That is not much at the moment, because I am under higher orders, the King's ; but to quit you in anger, to be turned out of your heart—that is hard ; nevertheless, if it must be it must."

"I am glad there is at least a spark of filial feeling in your nature, though I could wish the King a better man to fight his battles. Listen, sir. I can remember you cooing in your mother's arms ; but, by our good Lord, I would rather see you dead at my feet than dishonoured. The crime you have committed is in my eyes a sin, only to be atoned by marriage, in which case, with Heaven's help, the rough path may be smoothed by love and duty until it is filled with flowers and sweet perfumes."

"You always were a fine old buck!"

exclaimed George, lost for the moment in admiration of his father, and expressing himself in barrack slang. "I beg your pardon—a fine noble gentleman."

"Burns, go and tell them to pack up Mr. George's things."

Burns went.

"They are packed already, the very few I require," said George.

"Did you mean to insult me when you called me that name just now?" asked the vicar, when Burns had disappeared.

"Insult you, father! The fellow would never forget it who dared to insult you in my presence. No lad was ever more proud of his father than I am."

"Then obey me, George."

"I won't be bounced into an affair as if I were a mere automaton."

"But you will marry poor little Jessie. I baptised the child, she is a member of my

flock, a singer in my choir ; be a good man, George, if not for my sake, for your mother's ; it will kill her."

George was moved a little at this ; and the vicar, with tears in his eyes, took the boy's hand, saying, "Your duty is so simple, George ; do act the part of a good son and an honest man. I'll change places, George, and be humble to you ; I'll go on my knees to you."

And the vicar, in the bitterness of his grief, seemed as if he would have done so, had not his son restrained him.

But a few minutes afterwards they parted, nevertheless, George Wingfield obstinate, the vicar firm as at first, and resolved no longer to consider he had a son.

"You'll shake hands, father, before I go."

“When you claim the right of an obedient son and an honourable man, my hand and my heart are yours. Go and repent!”

There was a final parade of the regiment that evening in the market-place. The strains of the band were hard to bear at the Vicarage, where the white-haired minister sat with his patient invalided wife, trying to comfort her, for George had said farewell to her, and she as yet knew nothing of the sad circumstances under which he and his father had parted.

The martial music fell upon Jessie Burns's ear as she pressed her infant to her heart, and prayed for its father's safe return, as if he had been ever so faithful and true. The bay of the trumpet, the clash of the drums, were wafted by a

westerly breeze to the Hall, where Susan Hardwick sat, stunned with the news that Oliver North had enlisted and refused to be bought off.

A strange visitor had conveyed this information, no less a person than the Hon. Philip Scruton, who had waited upon her father, in a wild humour, to tell him that, "Begad, sir, Lord Ellerbie is a miserly wretch, who has refused to continue my allowance, who refuses to pay my debts, and who actually avers that he will sanction my arrest should my creditors go to such extremes." He had come, he said, for advice and assistance to Mr. Hardwick, and he had insisted that Miss Susan should not leave the room; "relations should be on good terms," he said; "and Mr. Oliver North's change of profession will, of course, make Lord Ellerbie's courtship all the easier." Susan

had almost staggered out of the room under the double blow of an insult and a piece of news that was terrible to her; and her father had not seen any fitting way to resent the savage intrusion of Mr. Scruton, who was not sober, and whose manners were offensively familiar. "Tell your daughter," he said, when he went away, "if she must be a countess she had better wait for me; she's a deuced fine girl, and there will be no parsimony about me when I come into the estates and the title."

All Chesterfield was in the market-place to see the troops parade, and especial interest was manifested in the recruits, who had also been ordered to muster. They were a sturdy little group, of which the sergeant might well feel proud. Tom Bertram, bronzed and sturdy, was among the number; so was Oliver North, pale and dejected.

“Will you recruit an honourable?” asked Philip Scruton, walking up to the sergeant, from whose tall headgear the colours were flying in a streaming bunch of ribbons.

“I’d enlist the devil himself,” was the answer.

“The bailiffs can’t take away one of your company?”

“What do you mean ; arrest him ?”

“Yes.”

“Devil a bit of it.”

“And I can buy myself off next week?”

“That’s so.”

“Do you know me?”

“No.”

“I am the Hon. Philip Scruton, heir to the Earldom of Ellerbie.”

“You’ll not be the first high-born gentleman who’s taken the King’s shilling and *not* bought himself off after, but

purchased his steps and is now in command."

"Give me the shilling," said Scruton, and the crowd stared mightily to see Lord Ellerbie's nephew don the ribbons, and join the muster of young fellows out of uniform.

"Mr. North," he said, "your hand; you've lost a pretty girl, but gained a staunch friend. We can both hate Lord Ellerbie together now."

Oliver did not reply.

"Don't be surly; I don't care whether we are friends or enemies, for that matter," went on the new recruit, and the third whose fortunes this history will more especially follow.

"Right about face; march!" commanded the sergeant, and the little company moved off, leaving the ground clear for the march past of the regiment, colours flying;

the captain on horseback, Ensign Wingfield marching on the left of the column.

“I shannat say good-bye to-night, Tom, lad,” said Mary Kirk’s father, when the recruits were dismissed to their quarters. “I shall be on the ground first thing in the morning. She doesna know thou’rt going yet, and I donnat think we’ll tell her. Cheer up, my lad! Things is looking about as black as they can; but it’s darkest, they say, before the dawn.”

Old Jim Pearson, the blacksmith, of Beetwell-street, always burnt his fire long after the neighbouring shops were shut, and on this night of the last parade he had a customer for an unusual and curious job.

Tom Bertram bared his brawny arm and handed Jim Pearson Mary Kirk’s

bracelet, which Susan Hardwick had given him as a keepsake.

“I want it riveted on just there, round my wrist, so that it’ll never come off, dead or alive !”

It was a picture worthy of an historical painter—the young recruit standing in the light of the smithy fire, while the token of his love was literally welded with hot rivets that burnt the flesh once or twice, though Jim Pearson was as gentle at his work as if the arm had been a woman’s.

CHAPTER II.

MR. SEPTIMUS DOBBS.

I wonder men dare trust themselves with men.

SHAKSPERE.

IT had been an unusually hot autumn, and the guests at the Angel were sitting out in the tavern yard, drinking and smoking by the light of a couple of oil lamps and the glorious autumn moon.

They were a very miscellaneous assembly, and the talk was loud and noisy. It chiefly related to the marching of the regiment which had been quartered so long in the neighbourhood; to the local recruits; and to the war.

There were a couple of sportsmen, who had been shooting on the adjacent moors, among the company, and an angler who was going to lash the Derwent and the picturesque Derbyshire Wye. They tried to give sport and angling a chance in the general conversation, but to no purpose.

The hero of the night was Philip Scruton, who sat in a big wooden arm-chair that had been brought out of the house especially for him. He sat at the head of one of the tables, stretching out his long legs in a pair of velvet breeches, his coat flung back, showing his rich embroidered vest, a long pipe in his mouth, and the King's colours in his conically-shaped hat that lay by his chair.

"I tell you, gentlemen, we have been beaten contemptuously! Begad, we ran! The British ran, don't deny it," Mr. Scruton was saying, as Ensign Wingfield

came lounging in to smoke a last pipe with his townsmen, and to try to forget his troubles.

“Who says so?” exclaimed the young fellow, the devil rampant in his heart, for he hated himself that night more than he hated Napoleon.

“I say so!” answered Scruton.

“Then you lie!” exclaimed Mr. Wingfield.

“Hear, hear!” shouted the guests, in a loud unanimous protest against Mr. Scruton’s strictures on the troops.

Scruton leaped to his feet and rushed at the young officer, a tankard in his hand, which would have come down upon the Ensign’s head, had not Oliver North caught the falling arm, and twisting Scruton’s wrist with scientific cleverness hurled him back into his seat.

“I say you lie, too! We all say it!”

exclaimed Oliver, "and you can't fight all of us!"

"That's true," said the landlord, "and I will not have brawling here! Gentlemen, gentlemen! The landlord of the Angel to have to send for the watch, and in the presence of strangers! I blush for you!"

A roar of laughter greeted this last declaration of the rubicund host.

"So you do!" said Wingfield; "your blush is chronic. But I beg your pardon, sir," continued the Ensign, turning to Scruton, "I did not see who you were, though an officer in the King's army cannot be expected to allow any man to call his comrades cowards."

"George Wingfield, I accept your apology. Outside our military positions, I am your superior in rank, birth, and prospects. In the army, you are above

me, and, as I am now one of the King's private soldiers, I cannot call you out; or, by St. Mark, I would shoot you!"

"How long has His Majesty the King been honoured by your enlistment, sir?" asked George, taking up a pipe and filling it with tobacco.

"A few hours; and one day when our positions in the army are nearer a level than they are to-day I may refer to this night's insult."

"As you wish; if you would like me to sink my rank, and I think I may take that liberty, considering that you have not yet passed the doctor and been sworn in, we will adjourn for ten minutes at once."

"I tell you this shall not be!" exclaimed the landlord. "Have I no authority in my own house?"

"Shall I go for the constable?" asked the politician whose opinions we heard

something of in the opening chapters of this history.

“No, sir,” said Oliver North. “This neighbourhood has had enough to do with fetching constables for Mr. Scruton.”

“Yes, that’s true,” said the politician, sitting down. “I saw poor old Kirk to-day, and I felt sorry for him.”

“You did!” exclaimed Oliver.

“I did,” said the usually hard-mouthed burgess.

“Then I begin to have some hopes of human nature,” said North.

“Ah! ah! ah!” roared Scruton, derisively. “The beggar is trying to comfort himself! Fancy a man trying to find sympathy in old Drybones.”

“You are an insolent fellow,” said the politician.

“To-night, yes; you won’t say so when I’m Lord Ellerbie.”

"I will," said the politician.

"Then I'll foreclose that mortgage on your mill," said Scruton, laughing rudely, "and I'll set up North and his gim-crack inventions in opposition."

North rose to his feet; but it was now Ensign Wingfield's turn to interfere.

"Don't notice the fellow, he is drunk; he doesn't know what he says, and, if he did, it wouldn't matter," said Wingfield.

"Gentlemen all," said the landlord, laying down his pipe, "I do hope we shall all consider the honour of the house; there are sportsmen present; there are strangers from London waiting for the North mail; and the night afore a detachment of the King's Royal Infantry is going to leave us, is a night for harmony and friendship, not for quarrelling."

"Hear, hear!" said the guests.

"Very well, then!" exclaimed Scruton,

“it shall not be said that I created discord without atonement. I am a gentleman, and hope I shall be remembered as such.”

“Bravo, hear, hear!” answered the guests.

“I will ask the honour of our all drinking a cup together to our better fortunes. Landlord, let the order be given, and charged to me.”

“By all means,” said the host aloud, adding aside, “he’ll never pay a penny of it.”

Another diversion was created at this moment by the entrance from the side-door of the tavern of Mr. Septimus Dobbs, the most cantankerous of local lawyers, and the steward of Lord Ellerbie.

“Ah, here’s my friend!” exclaimed Scruton. “Welcome, old Sobersides!”

“Good evening, gentlemen,” said Mr. Dobbs, a cleanly-shaven, taciturn-looking

little man in a drab Quaker-like suit, a double eye-glass dangling from a gold chain outside his tightly-buttoned coat, his neck stiffened by a tall stock, his cheeks colourless, his lips thin, his eyes restless, his manner that of a man who is received civilly because people are afraid of him.

"Come here, I tell you, old miser!" exclaimed Scruton.

Mr. Dobbs made his way to where Scruton was sitting.

"Have you brought me any money?" asked the aristocratic recruit in a whisper.

"Don't be foolish, Mr. Scruton. Can't you see that everybody is looking at us."

"What do I care!"

"You are not in a fit state to discuss business."

"If you delay answering my question I'll make a row: I have had one already."

"You know what I always say," answer-

ed the lawyer, while the other people began to talk among themselves.

“Yes, every fool knows. It has become a byword in Chesterfield. Don’t criminate yourself,” said Scruton, laughing derisively. “What has that old wretch, your master, decided?”

“Not to pay another penny for you,” said Dobbs, “since you want the business put straight and plain before you,”

“What! Won’t he pay my debts?”

“No.”

“Not the money I owe in Chesterfield?”

“No.”

“Let me go like a beggar?”

“Yes; he says you have elected to be a soldier, and he hopes you’ll like it.”

“Curse him!”

“But he will buy you a commission.”

“Curse him!”

“He does not wish his nephew to herd

with *canaille*, unless his nephew desires it."

"Curse him again! Tell him his nephew does desire it. Let him beware!"

"Don't say that! Don't say anything that may be taken down and given in evidence against you!"

"What do you mean?"

"In reference to what *you* mean, I say don't criminate yourself; but always rely on my friendship, on my sympathy, on my devotion."

"Give me a proof of it."

"I will, my dear Philip, I will. When you leave here to-morrow you will find two hundred guineas in your pouch and a credit note for a similar sum on a London banker."

"My benefactor! my Croesus! You are a rich old miser, eh? Are you not? But this is good of you. Is it your own money?"

“Yes.”

“*He* thinks I am going away a beggar?”

“Yes.”

“He is a wolf.”

“Lord Ellerbie is not the man he was since Mr. Hardwick got into his confidence.”

“Oh! Old Hardwick interferes with you, does he?”

“Yes, old Hardwick is gradually worming himself into my place, and——”

“You think I may be a useful ally? You don’t know how yet, but you think so?”

“Mr. Philip, you are quite sober now,” answered Mr. Dobbs, taking a long deep pinch of snuff, and handing the box to Scruton.

“I begin to see things in a new light.

I hate my uncle, and you don't like Hardwick."

"I hate Hardwick," said Dobbs, coldly, and without the slightest indication of passion in his voice.

"Now surely *you* are criminating yourself," said Scruton.

"I thought we were talking business?"

"Yes, yes."

"Let us step aside and walk a little."

They left the yard. The lawyer led the way into a dark passage, opened a door with a key, and they were in his office, which was lighted by the moon, that still hung in the sky like a great round lamp.

"It is neither in your interest nor mine," said Dobbs, "that your uncle should marry Hardwick's daughter."

"No! I would rather marry her myself."

"That's out of the question."

“ Why ?”

“ For many reasons, this in particular : it is settled that she marries your uncle ; that she is to be the Countess of Ellerbie.”

“ When ?”

“ In six months from to-day, perhaps earlier. In the meantime the Earl becomes Hardwick’s business partner, and Hardwick is a fox.”

“ And in spite of the proverb about fox not eating fox, you want to dine off Hardwick.”

“ I want you to buy yourself off from the army, as you can, secretly ; and let me know your movements.”

“ Oh ! but I would have liked to have had a turn with these beggars. I have a score to settle with Mr. Oliver North and I have planned some amusement besides.”

“ Don’t you think North is sufficiently

trodden on—chucked out of the mill by Hardwick, ordered out of the Hall by Hardwick's daughter?"

"Not by the girl herself?"

"Yes."

"Damme, she's a Briton! I shall fall in love with her next: I like a woman of spirit."

"Do we join forces?"

"We do. Give me some money to pay regimental expenses at once. But, begad, my hungry creditors may seize me to-morrow!"

"They cannot. Besides, they think the Earl will pay them. Did you not tell them so?"

"Yes, hang them!"

"Very well, you will report yourself to me; not here, never here; the Cock Tavern in Fleet Street, by Temple Bar.

A letter left there, addressed 'Simmons,' I shall get it."

"Sly old fox, how do you know the Cock?"

"I know a good many things."

"So did young Marks, whom they hanged. Have a care, Mr. Dobbs," said Scruton, patting him jocularly on the shoulder.

"Whom *you* hanged, Scruton," said Dobbs, "and who was innocent. Don't let us ever put our necks in danger, or justice might make a mistake and hang you instead of me."

"Which means that there may be danger in our alliance, eh?"

"Yes."

"And that you would hang me as soon as look at me to save your own neck?"

“Just as old Short hanged his partner’s son.”

“What do you mean?”

“That Short was the thief.”

“No!”

“Did it never occur to you in that light?”

“No, so help me heaven!”

“I was sure of the fool’s innocence.”

“And yet you instructed counsel, and was the prosecuting lawyer.”

“That is so. I could not alter the evidence. The moral of which is,—Philip Scruton, never criminate yourself!”

CHAPTER III.

WHILE THE TROOPS ARE MARCHING.

There is one warning lesson in life which few of us have not received, and no book that I can call to memory has noted down with an adequate emphasis. It is this, "Beware of Parting." The true sadness is in the when and the how you are to meet again with the face about to vanish from your view ; from the passionate farewell to the woman who has your heart in her keeping, to the cordial good-bye exchanged with pleasant companions at a watering-place, a country house, or the close of a festive day's blithe and careless excursion. A chord stronger or weaker is snapped asunder at every parting, and Time's busy fingers are not practised in resplicing broken ties. Meet again you may. Will it be in the same way ? With the same sympathies, with the same sentiments ? Will the souls hurrying on in divers paths unite once more as if the interval had been a dream ? Rarely, rarely.

BULWER LYTTON.

FIVE o'clock in the morning, and
already the bugles had echoed

through the streets of the old town, which was wide awake.

A bright September morning, with a great flock of swallows chattering over the old Sessions House, and gathering together from all parts of the town, as if they, too, had been summoned to take their departure also.

Clank of swords, and tramp of feet, were responded to from open windows, at which heads peered out, and from doors flung wide, with men and women on the steps, to see the brave fellows start for the war.

Blue columns of smoke went up to the sky from the Angel, opposite whose wide gateway there was already a muster of some few early risers, military and civilian, the red coats mingling peacefully and picturesquely with the more subdued colours of the ordinary costume of the time.

From every avenue in the market-place men, women, and children straggled towards the Angel, and as the morning wore on they poured into the square in crowds; for the King's Own Royals—which the regiment under orders was intended to reinforce—had made its colours famous, and the memories of Corunna and the death of Moore had given to the war in Spain a new interest.

The recruits were to march out with the colours more for *éclat* and enlistment purposes than on account of immediate necessity, though it was intended that the recent levies should go to the front in due course, their first destination being understood to be Ireland.

Five o'clock in the morning, and yet Susan Hardwick was up and dressed, and Tom Bertram was by her side, under the tall elms, in front of the Hall. A black-

bird was singing joyously, right upon the topmost branch of the tallest tree. The first leaves of the autumn had begun to fall. They made a brown and yellow carpet for the dainty feet of the proud mill-owner's daughter, and Tom's great flat boot pressed them down into the grass until they looked like an embossed decoration on a green velvet carpet.

How quiet it all was, notwithstanding the distant hum of voices, the tramp of feet, the faint challenge of trumpets, and the answering cries of chanticleer ! Susan could almost hear her heart beat.

"Tell him," she said, "I will wait for him in the meadow by the orchard."

"Yes, miss."

"Tell him no one will see us there."

"Yes, miss."

"I cannot ask him to come here ; and I fear he would not if I did."

“I think he would.”

“He persists in his present course?”

“Do you mean he is bent on going to the war?”

“Yes, he refuses to be bought off, or to have anything done for him?”

“He does; I’m sure of that.”

“And it is all through me!”

“Well, you see, Miss Hardwick, I don’t exactly know the rights of it; he’s just a bit above me like as to education and position, and it’s not likely that he’d tell me his secrets; but I heard him say to Mr. Ensign Wingfield that he didn’t think the reason had been even dreamt on as could mak’ him change his mind. Eh, dear, it’s a pity if matches, as they say is made in heaven, the parties to ’em don’t have notice of it when they’re children, so as they shouldn’t go prowling off on a wrong scent.”

“Perhaps he will not come to me ; he is very proud ?” said Susan, not listening to Tom’s philosophical reflections ; “and I should be deeply grieved if he did not say good-bye.”

“Oh ! he shall come somehow ; I’ll see that he comes.”

“Thank you, Tom ; thank you.”

She was quite humble to the young yeoman, the haughty lady who had turned so hotly upon Oliver North a day or two before, and who erewhile had played the queen and patron to Tom.

“Don’t thank me, Miss Hardwick, it isn’t worth it ; we shall march down the Vicar’s Lane along Lordsmill Street, and at the bottom, opposite Potter’s Field, he can run up by the tan-yard and meet you in the meadows, of course he can. The sergeant will let him do that, and if he won’t the young officer will, for we are only

going to march to Mansfield to-day, where they hope to pick up some more recruits. Don't be afraid that he'll go without a good-bye and some token of remembrance."

And then she was alone. Tom had held her hand in his for a moment; he had said "Don't let Mary forget me altogether;" and presently Susan was sitting listlessly on the old garden-chair, where we first saw her. All was still in the house; the wrecked mill showed no signs of life, but the sun was shining brightly.

Presently Susan gathered her long grey cloak about her and passed out of the Hall grounds, and, crossing the lane that leads to the factory, entered the meadows, through which there was a private path to the little sparkling river that ran merrily along through corn-fields and grazing land, and finally slipped away under the

bridge that crossed it in the London Road by the Horns.

Great shadows of poplars and elms fell across her path; she passed apple-trees full of fruit; she went through a yellow corn-field, the sheaves awaiting the carriers; the country was full of a soft, soothing loveliness, but Susan felt it only as a rebuke and a satire.

She sat down by the brook and thought over her past life, and wondered what she ought to do. She had never before confessed to herself that she loved Oliver North, and even now she did not intend to tell him. She was angry with herself for speaking to him as she had done, and she was angry with him for enlisting. It did not strike her as a brave action in one whose gifts lay in such a different direction from that of arms. She felt that it was the act of pique or despair, that it

was unworthy of Oliver North, and yet it touched her to the quick; it roused her feelings as no other act could have done; it showed her how utterly empty life was to him without her.

Susan's was a curiously inconsistent nature, weak in its strength, strong in its weakness. She was capable of great sacrifice, capable of a high and noble devotion; and yet there were flaws in her character which made her conduct a puzzle to even those who knew her best.

The old crooked spire looked down from its high place among the clouds, through a whirling crowd of swallows which were beating up to head-quarters like the King's troops for their long journey; and saw the flash of colours and the busy movement of people in the market-place which made that distant buzz Susan thought she could just hear

above the music of the brook and the hum of insect life and the song of birds. Presently the busy sound did reach her away in the meadows, and she stood up to listen.

At first it was a murmur that rose and fell like the wind. Then it was a hum like bees. It grew louder. It was marked in bars, marked by the beat of a drum. The regiment was on the march. She pressed her hand on her heart. A wave of music seemed to come over the meadows. Then, as if the on-coming troops had turned a corner into some path that led to her, the melody of "The Manchester Angel" came pealing through the calm air, the pathetic sweetness of it bringing the tears into her eyes as the touching melody had done, and will again to many another's, even without the cause which she had for weeping. On it came, the music of the band with clash of

cymbals and beat of drum; on it came like a condemnation of her, filling the air, silencing the birds and the river, swelling through the trees, growing louder and louder as if all Chesterfield was full of it.

She covered her face with her hands to shut it out, and she had hardly done so when the plaint of the lover set so beautifully for cornet and French horn, for trombone and clarionet, ceased. There was a short pause, followed by a scream of fife and a crash of drums, and the regiment was marching to the sharp, brisk air of "The Girl I left Behind Me," with the first notes of which Oliver North entered the meadow where Susan was standing, attended by the corporal's guard, which, however, halted in the road by the cottage of Nannie Dawson, one of the oldest inhabitants, a crooning dame of eighty odd

years, who was already up, and smoking a short pipe on her doorstep.

“Miss Hardwick,” said Oliver, his voice trembling, “you wished to see me?”

She turned a pale, proud, anxious face towards him.

He looked into her brown eyes, which drooped under his gaze.

“I want you to forgive me, if you can,” she said.

“There is nothing to forgive,” he answered; “nothing on my side.”

“Oh! yes, there is. I ought to have sympathized with you in your trouble; but a child cannot well stand by and hear her father traduced.”

“No, no, I was wrong, and I did not know that you had approved of his plans for you, the wisdom of which I am bound to acknowledge.”

“Mr. North, you do me an injustice;

but it is too late for explanations, if you are still bent on the terrible sacrifice you are making."

"What sacrifice?"

"Your ambition, your great schemes in the interest of labour, your nearly perfected inventions."

"They were only part of a selfish purpose—a dream of happiness too wild for these prosaic days, and so let them fall with my hopes of that heaven to which they were but steps. Oh! Miss Hardwick—Susan let me call you in these last moments—it would have been better for us both that we had never met."

He turned away from her. She followed his averted face with her tearful eyes.

"But will it mend matters, Oliver," she said, "to put seas and battlefields between us? Don't go on this mad expedition; whatever happens, it will be better that

you stayed at home. Let men who are born to carry arms, men who aspire to military glory, give themselves to their country in the field; you owe a higher allegiance to science and to peace."

"What!" he exclaimed, "to have my inventions trampled on by a brutal mob, and the one hope that inspired me mocked and denounced as treason? No, I have done with it all, Susan; and you mistake me too. I am all on fire with the wrongs of my country, burning to join our gallant troops who are to rid Europe of a demon."

"It is not yourself that speaks," said Susan.

"Is it my pride? Well, it has slumbered long enough. Is it my despair? It will find scope for utterance and for action soon."

He spoke with a curl of the lip at one

moment, tears in his voice the next—he hardly knew what he said.

Suddenly seizing her hand, he said,

“Susan Hardwick, let us be plain with each other. We may never meet again. You are a woman of sense, and a dutiful child, and my words now may be dismissed an hour hence as those of one who will not cross your path or your plans any more.”

She bent her head over the hand which he still clasped.

“I love you with all my heart and soul, and, when you think of my many acts of presumption, I want you to remember my folly, and forgive me for the sake of our common nature. A man cannot help it that he loves; it is a plague or a blessing, a curse or a joy, as fate wills it; but it comes like the sun, and the poor trusting fellow never believes in the storm until the lightning flashes and the tempest is on him.”

The martial strains in the streets had changed again, the brass instruments had once more taken up their duty. It was "My Lodging is on the Cold Ground" that had this time been converted into a march, and it was one of the melodies that Susan Hardwick had often played on the harpsichord that stood on four thin legs which seemed, in the reflection of the polished floor, to join four other thin legs below the old drawing-room. Oliver paused to listen. She looked up at him, and, placing her other hand upon his, began to speak. Her words were drowned by the roll of a drum outside the by-road near old Nannie's cottage.

"Say it again, I'm dreaming!" he exclaimed, stooping over her.

"I love you, Oliver, I love you!" she said, as the roll of the signal for departing was echoed back from the walls of the distant mill.

“My darling !” he exclaimed taking her in his arms, “this is the happiest moment of my life ! But it is a precious joy, too sweet to last. I have surprised you into this confession ; that sweet melody, the thought of parting, in this you forget all but my sadness ; it is like your kind heart. Look at me, Susan, and listen to what I say.”

She raised a face, smiling through its tears, to his ; he kissed it.

“ You shall have time to reflect ; I will not snatch you from a life of plenty to one of poverty, in this thoughtless moment when pity may be mistaken for love ; but let me go with the happy memory of your dear confession in my soul, and this token of it next my heart, and I will come back to ask you if I may renew this intercourse where that cruel drum is breaking it off.”

He untied a ribbon on her shoulder as

he spoke, and put it into the breast pocket of his civilian coat.

“Must you go?” she murmured.

“It is best, it is best!” he said. “Good-bye, Susan, good-bye! When I come back——”

“I am yours!” she said, flinging herself into his arms.

The corporal stepped through the gate from old Nannie’s cottage. Oliver beckoned him; Susan had fainted. They carried her into the little house.

“Oh, indeed!” said the worthy descendant of a noble race, Mr. William Rutland Hardwick, speaking to himself from the other side of the hedge and in the shade of an oak, “oh, indeed! Susan is a bigger fool than I thought her, and he is an honestest man. She inherits that weak strain in her character from her mother’s side, not from mine. I would not have

believed it, had I not heard and seen it with my own ears and eyes. She has actually fainted. Fainted! My strong-minded daughter Susan, fainted at a common fellow who is ass enough to enlist for a soldier! Damme! I might rate at her for a month and she wouldn't even vince."

He peeped over the hedge, looking in the direction of Nannie's cottage.

"She will be all right there," he said. "I must not run the risk of letting her imagine for a moment that I have been eavesdropping; she would never suspect me of getting up at cock-crow and walking in the damp fields on such an errand. Ah! she does not know how sly as well as brave a Hardwick can be, when the honour of his family name and the happiness of his daughter are at stake."

He picked up his crutch-stick and

commenced to retrace his steps homeward.

“But I must have that ribbon,” he said, as he crept along by tree and hedge. “I must have that ribbon!”

CHAPTER IV.

AN ALLIANCE OFFENSIVE AND DEFENSIVE.

Love, Fortune, Death, blind guides by turns,
 Teach man their dance with artful skill.
 First, from Love's treacherous wiles he learns
 To thread the maze, where'er he will.
 Then Fortune comes, whose tuneless measure
 Bids him whirl and wind at pleasure,
 Till in the giddy dance his feet
 Lead him, watchful, Death to meet.
 Then follow all of mortal breath—
 The dance of Fortune, Love, and Death.

PIERRE MICHault, *translated by* LOUISA COSTELLO.

“YOU'RE better now, Miss Hardwick,”
 said Nannie Lomas; “that's right,
 walk about a bit; it'll do you good.”

“How did I come here?”

“They carried you.”

"Who did?"

"Mester North and the corporal."

"How foolish of me!"

"No, it's nobbut natural."

"What do you mean?"

"When I was a lass, I should ha' done same mysen; I did, however! I fainted right away when Dick Lomas went to feight, seventy year ago, though I was only a lass of fifteen."

"Had I fainted?"

"Yes, yo'd fainted fast enough."

"And they carried me in here?"

"Yes."

"And what did they do then?"

"Why, North just kissed thee, and called thee his love, tow'd me to tak' care on thee, and put out my filthy pipe, and then off they went."

Susan sat down by the warm hearth-stone and shivered as if the sun was not

blazing on the window panes and trying to put out the fire.

“Nay, I’m sure it isna cold,” said Nannie, taking a steaming kettle off the hob, and making tea in a little black pot, “the fire hasna been out for a twelvemonth. I always keep it in night and day, summer and winter.”

“No, I’m not cold,” said Susan. “What is the time?”

Nannie consulted a brass clock, set in a long thin case, black with age and florid with carving, that would in the present day have realised fifty pounds in Bond Street.

“Seven,” said the old woman.

“I will go home, then.”

“Not till you’ve had some tea, and a bit of toast.”

“No, I will not have anything.”

“But you must, miss; he towld me to

tak' care on you, and I will, though he was impudent about my bit of a pipe, the only indulgence as I allows myself, just a whiff after breakfast, dinner, and supper; a woman at ninety needs some little stimulation."

"Did he leave any message? Did he say anything else?"

"No, but he looked enough for a hundred messages."

Susan watched the strangely nimble old woman in her flowered print gown and tall cap as she bustled about the clean house-place chattering and preparing breakfast, all traces of the little black pipe gone, and the cottage the picture of comfort.

A red brick floor, white-washed walls, decorated with a few tin pans and sauce-pan lids, a musket, a sword and bayonet, a few bags of herbs, an old print of a battle, the figure of a soldier cut out in

black paper, a pair of bellows and a warming-pan ; near an inner door that led to a bed-room a spinning-wheel set for work ; a round shining table in the middle of the room, standing on ever so many twisted legs ; an arm-chair with a high back, and full of cushions ; an old oak chest that served for a seat under a diamond-paned window full of asters and geraniums ; two chairs with broad seats and narrow backs ; a fireplace blackened with tar, and on the mantel-shelf some old jugs, a tobacco-pouch, and half a dozen peacock's feathers.

"There now, Susan Hardwick," said Nannie, addressing her with the proud familiarity of the north, "you have that cup of tea, there's a bit of green in it, it'll do you good, and me too. I don't often have such a fine lady as you to sit at my table !"

Susan pushed the hood of her cloak

back from her well-shaped head, looked up wonderingly at old Nannie, and sipped the tea.

“ That’s right, you must bow to the will of God, whatever He sends, though to see that mill broken and still is a heartaching sight; yet it’s nothing; it’s only a small trouble after all, and Lord Ellerbie, he has plenty of brass.”

The old woman placed on the table some dainty buttered toast.

“ And it isn’t often as a fine lady prefers a common soldier with nowt to a lordship with thousands. There, don’t you mind what I say. I’m not long for this world, and sometimes very clever learned folk come to talk wi’ me about things I remember. I heard John Wesley, the great minister, preach when I was a lass, and I’ve always remembered comforting things

he said, and, though I've had trouble, I've niver been what you may call unhappy."

The old woman sat down before the fire, and smoothed her apron on her knees, while the sun came streaming in through the little front garden, and in at the open door.

"My lad Dick, he was my husband, and I never were blessed with children; he left me first to fight the French in Flanders; and I can remember, as if it was to-day, the Pretender and his army entering Derby. They brought news to Chesterfield, and, when I heard the drums and fifes this morning, it came into my mind, for the lads was all ready to give them a welcome: but, rebels, they retreated, and so we had no battle; and I remember my poor Dick, when he came home inva-

lided, saying how mad he'd a been if we'd had any fighting while he was away. Eh! but he was out in them wars for years at a time, and I never had a line from him, or a message; and if it hadn't been for bit o' brass as my father left me in Derby bank, I'd a bin starved. I don't think you can hear what I say."

"Oh! yes, Mrs. Dawson," said Susan, her thoughts following the music of the regimental band, which she fancied she still heard.

"My Dick was in the Seven Years' War. He was wounded in the siege of Quebec, and killed by them Yankees at Bunker's Hill. So, you see, he was not much of a husband to me; and a woman might as well be married to a sailor as a soldier, and neither one on 'em ought to get wed, for they can have wives, as you may say, wherever they goes, but a woman mun be

true and faithful, and she doesn't know half the time whether she's a wife or a widow. And what I say to you is, you may feel your heart painful like at parting, but it's better you shouldn't encourage yourself a-thinking of him. There'll be time enough for that when you're his lordship's widow."

"Mrs. Dawson," said Susan, rising from her chair, "you presume on your age and upon my condescension."

"Well, age is something you may presume on, Susan Hardwick! Everybody knows that them two old men have settled who your husband is to be, and I'm as good as a mother to you, in giving you good advice at the right time."

"Give it when it is asked, Nannie."

"Sorry I've offended you. When your father comes to ask what you did here this morning, what shall I say?"

"He will not come ; he does not know I came here."

"He'll find out," said Nannie, beginning to wash up the tea-things.

"Not unless you tell him."

"Oh, bless you, he'd ferret out the secret of philosopher's stone, if there was such a thing."

"I didn't know you knew Mr. Hardwick?"

"I know everybody," said Nannie, smiling, her parchment features wrinkling all over with the effort. "I've had Lord Ellerbie himself sitting in that old chair ; Mr. Scruton too ; and your father many a time. Mr. North was too proud. Folk as springs from nowt often is prouder than them as is born lords and ladies. Ah, you'd be surprised if you know'd all I know."

There was a peculiar arrogance of know-

ledge in the old woman's manner that startled Susan.

"Bless you! No, I'm not a witch. There's more power in that bright eye of yours to mak' folk do what you want than there is in mine. I've nowt else to do but find out what's going on."

"And I have too much to do to waste time on the gossip of Chesterfield; so I will say good morning, and thank you for your hospitality. I would give you money if you would not be too proud to take it."

"And I would take it if I didn't know you are too poor to have any to give away."

"Thank you, Mrs. Dawson! I am justly punished in being insulted for sitting down with you. Mr. North ought to have known better than subject me to this; I ought to have known better myself."

"Nay, nay, Miss Hardwick, don't think hard of me. It's my way to speak out,

and I couldn't insult you on score of money when I know you might be Countess of Ellerbie to-morrow, and will be afore a year is over."

"Never!" said Susan, "and you are an impudent, meddling old woman."

Nannie chuckled and laughed.

"That's right! Now you'll be better. I wanted to rouse you out of them dumps as you were in. That's right! Come and see me whenever you feel bad. You'll always find me the same."

Susan turned her back on the old woman, and went to the door. Then she paused, and, suddenly facing her with flashing eyes, she said,

"You can tell my father I have been here, or not, just as you please. I wish to share no secret with you."

"That's right! You will feel ever so much better. Stop! I shan't tell

him nor nobody unless you ask me."

Susan went home the way she had come, and found her father sitting down to breakfast.

"You have been walking early this morning, my dear."

"Yes, father."

"A lovely morning, is it not?"

"It is."

"I waited for you, and then thought I had better begin alone, though I dislike breakfasting by myself."

"I am glad you did not wait; I don't want any breakfast."

"My love, how is that? Not well?"

"No; I feel tired."

"Have a cup of tea? That will revive you."

"No, thank you; I have had a cup."

"Before you went out?"

"No, at Nannie Dawson's cottage."

“Oh ! I did not know you were acquainted with Nannie.”

“I went into her cottage this morning.”

“Indeed ! Well ?”

But Susan did not seem inclined to say any more.

“You will sit down, and pour me out some coffee, won’t you ? It is so lonely sitting by myself. Ah ! Susan, it is a weary business, a solitary old age.”

“Is it ? You have not felt it yet, father,” said Susan, laying her cloak upon a chair, and sitting down in her accustomed place at the head of the table.

“No, but I feel it this morning ; and I cannot help sympathizing with poor Ellerbie.”

Susan filled the cup which Mr. Hardwick handed to her.

“And such a splendid house as Bracken-

bury Towers ! There is no more delightful place in the county."

"Poor Mary Kirk used to say it is haunted," said Susan.

"With a lively, kind-hearted old man, that's all. A pleasant young wife would soon exorcise any other ghost at Brackenbury Towers."

"That she might herself be haunted."

"How that she might be haunted ? You have a way of speaking in riddles, Susan."

"Haunted with an old man," said Susan, quietly.

"And a very respectable kind of ghost to be haunted by, an old man with a title and a fortune ; sharing the first at once with the lady, and leaving the last to her when he's dead ; and he can't live many years, you know."

“Are there girls to be found who sell themselves in that way?”

“Girls! There is hardly a single woman in the land who would not at once accept Lord Ellerbie, his estate, his title, his money.”

“It is strange that he does not ask one of them to be his wife, then, if he is so lonely.”

“He is about to ask one of them, the only one out of all the women in England whom he desires to make Countess of Ellerbie and mistress of Brackenbury Towers.”

A servant entered.

“Well, well, what is it?” asked Mr. Hardwick.

“Mr. Septimus Dobbs, sir,” the servant answered.

“Show him into the library.”

“Yes, sir.”

“What can he want?” said Mr. Hard-

wick. "He is a person I do not like ; I intend Lord Ellerbie shall dismiss him. But at present we must be civil to him. Excuse me, Susan."

"Good morning, Mr. Hardwick," said Mr. Dobbs, hat and cane in his black-gloved right hand, his double-rimmed eyeglasses reposing on the stiff frill of his starched shirt, the buckles on his shoes shining like the polished floor of Hardwick's dining-room, which almost reflected the "stodgy" figure of Dobbs, his bloodless, shaven face, short hair, and bushy eyebrows.

"Good morrow to you, sir," said Hardwick, pompously. "To what circumstance am I indebted for this honour, Mr. Dobbs?"

"Business, sir—our mutual welfare," answered Dobbs. "May I be permitted?"

"By all means, Mr. Septimus Dobbs ; take a seat, sir."

The lawyer laid his hat and stick on the floor by the side of his chair, put on his eyeglasses, and looked at Mr. Hardwick, who sat opposite to him, with a palpable effort to be calm, and not sacrifice one jot of his dignity.

The mill-owner pursed up his lips, fidgeted with his watch-seals, intimating thereby his impatience and his dislike of Mr. Dobbs, and at the same time his desire that the lawyer should at once proceed to the business in hand.

"It is not a writ, nor a process of any kind," said the lawyer, taking a paper from his breast-pocket, "nothing objectionable. It is the draft of the agreement between yourself and Lord Ellerbie concerning the rebuilding and refitting of the mill."

"Then take it to my lawyer, Mr. Dobbs; take it to my lawyer, sir!" said Hardwick, pompously.

"I thought you would like to talk this and other matters over with me first."

"No, sir, I would not like to do anything of the kind."

"I have been the family lawyer and steward of the Ellerbies for many years."

"And always my bitter enemy," said Mr. Hardwick, getting up, and walking to and fro with his hands behind his back.

"Enemy no longer, Mr. Hardwick. I propose a truce, an alliance. I lay down my arms, I ask terms of the conqueror."

Hardwick paused to look at Dobbs, who had assumed an attitude of bending humility. Then the proud mill-owner's mouth relaxed almost into a smile, but he still walked to and fro.

"Our enmity arose out of jealousy; I was afraid of you. I felt the shadow of

the man who was to eclipse the lawyer ; the trumpets of the conqueror sounded in my ear ; and to-day Mr. William Rutland Hardwick takes his place in the tents of the defeated Septimus Dobbs ; if that is the wish of the prospective father-in-law of Lord Ellerbie——”

Dobbs bent his head as if inviting Hardwick to plant his foot on his neck.

“Not at all, Mr. Dobbs,” said Hardwick ; “pray resume your seat ; I have no desire to perpetuate enmity, not at all, sir. I am a man of peace ; but, as the representative of one of the oldest families in the county, I have always claimed my right to the respect of the town, and precedence on public occasions.”

“Which hitherto I have contested with you. I do so no more. Your patience is rewarded. And so shall be your enterprise, if you will listen to me.”

“Well, well, what can I do for you?” said Mr. Hardwick, tossing his head, straightening himself, and playing haughtily with his watch-seals, which served him equally well as a safety-valve when he was angry, as they did when his vanity was more than usually active.

“I hold Lord Ellerbie in these hands; you shall hold me.”

“Well, that is a surrender, certainly; but explain.”

“Lord Ellerbie has hitherto taken my advice in all matters relating to the management of his property. If you and I don’t fight, he will continue to do so. If you and I are friends, I can carry out your wishes without the trouble to you of intrigues and the delays of other legal opinions. I can push on the marriage which you desire; I will enlarge the settlements; in short, I will be your

friend, as well as my lord's legal adviser."

"Well, well, that is fairly spoken, Mr. Dobbs, and it is a complete acknowledgment of our respective positions."

"You want a proof of my sincerity? Read that!"

Mr. Hardwick bent his head over the paper which the lawyer handed him, while Mr. Dobbs compressed his half-moon shaped mouth, lowered his bushy eyebrows, and took a long pinch of snuff.

"That is generous, truly; I will acknowledge that it is more liberal than I could have expected."

"I drew it, I made the additions; the only interest I have in it is to please you and retain my honoured appointment as the legal man of the Ellerbies; that is all—a mere matter of pride."

"An honourable pride, Mr. Dobbs, a

sentiment of which you have no reason to be ashamed."

"Thank you, Mr. Hardwick; it is an old saying of mine, 'Never criminate yourself.' But I am not obeying the injunction; I am placing myself unreservedly in your hands; I stand here at your mercy."

"And I extend to you the hand of amity and peace," said Hardwick.

Dobbs took the small white hand in his cold flabby paw, and thus ratified the alliance.

"Now our chief hopes, Mr. Hardwick, lie in the marriage of your daughter to Lord Ellerbie."

"That is one of the conditions the Earl makes, touching this new advance and partnership?" answered Mr. Hardwick.

"It is. One of the obstacles was removed this morning. Philip Scruton marched out of the town at daybreak as a

recruit. He can't come back because of his debts."

"But how was he an obstruction?"

"He swore to the Earl that he would carry off any girl he proposed to marry, or shoot his lordship at the altar."

"The scoundrel!" exclaimed Mr. Hardwick.

"You may well say so. Now it was my business to get Mr. Scruton out of the way. I have done it; and, please the heavenly justice, we shall never see him again."

"You are a great man!" said Mr. Hardwick, admiringly.

"The next obstacle was the misunderstanding between you and myself. We have just wiped that out."

"For ever!" said Hardwick; "but, my friend, there is another impediment."

"Indeed! What is it?"

Mr. Septimus Dobbs, when he entered the Hall that morning, little thought his hand was going to be so considerably strengthened, as he deemed it, by the disclosures which Mr. Hardwick made to him concerning Mr. Oliver North's parting with his daughter.

"I saw it all. I was an eye-witness, sir, to this folly of my child, to that audacity of a young man whom I had literally raised from the gutter! But understand, Mr. Dobbs, if I thought it was not for my daughter's happiness, if it were not for the name she bears, and from the promptings of a father's heart, I would not thwart her affections, however misplaced. She is too young to know her own mind; this imaginary love is but pity, and a silly girl's admiration for what people call genius. It is all a mistake, and she will thank me one day, thank me on her knees, for rescuing

her from poverty and a disgraceful *més-alliance*.

“I am sure of it,” said Dobbs. “Your conduct, Mr. Hardwick, is worthy of your race, and the alliance of the house of Hardwick with that of Ellerbie is one of which the entire nation will approve.”

“Mr. Dobbs, you flatter my judgment when you endorse it by your practical wisdom and sound sense.”

“And you are quite right, Mr. Hardwick,” continued Dobbs, not noticing this last remark of the mill-owner. “We must have that ribbon; I catch your shrewd view of its value. It can be used as evidence of his death.”

“That was not exactly what I meant.”

“No; what then?”

“Well, I thought that——”

“Suppose it were necessary to convince her of the news that he had been killed

fighting gallantly for his country, his last words, if accompanied by the ribbon she gave him at parting, would convince her, and knock down the last barrier in our march of marital and territorial conquest."

"You are quite eloquent, Mr. Dobbs."

"The situation inspires me! Rely on it, Mr. Hardwick, it was your good angel that sent me here this morning. I will get that ribbon for you. It shall be brought to her by the comrade at whose side he fell; and his last words shall be his own personal counsel to her to obey the wishes of her father."

"You are a wonderful man, Mr. Dobbs! Did you know that these were almost the last words of my dear wife, who died in the Countess's arms—I mean in Miss Hardwick's arms?"

"I did not," answered Dobbs; "but

heaven itself seems to have directed my steps to you this morning."

"Do you think so?"

"I do indeed; the Lord often uses strange instruments for his purpose, as I told a congregation at Brampton Chapel only last Sunday."

"I did not know that you were a preacher."

"I hold forth occasionally," said Dobbs, taking a copious pinch of snuff, and handing his box with friendly affability to his new ally. "I believe I make enemies by so doing; there are those who scoff at me, and all the more when they remember that I am the solicitor to a Roman Catholic family. But look what I have done, Mr. Hardwick! I have converted a once bigoted Catholic earl into a liberal tolerant gentleman, who subscribes to every public charity, regardless of sect or creed, who

even gives money towards building a Wesleyan Chapel, and heads the fund for keeping up the comical steeple on our Chesterfield Church."

"Yes, yes, it is wonderful."

"Mr. Scruton would not do it if he came into the title and estates. He is an awful Catholic; he would roast all Protestants alive!"

"Would he indeed?"

"If he could. Of course there is no chance of Rome ever having supremacy in England again; but Scruton is a Romanist from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot."

"He is a very dissipated person, I believe."

"Yes; but he counts his beads, and intrigues for the Pope."

"Isn't it odd, then, that he should join our Protestant army?"

“Why, bless you, Mr. Hardwick, the army is full of Catholics, and Scruton is one of those men who love fighting for its own sake.”

“Mr. Dobbs, I am very glad you came to see me. May I offer you a glass of wine?”

“No, thank you; too early to drink, must keep clear head, have much to think of, more than I expected; but it will all be easier now that you and I are friends, Mr. Hardwick.”

The mill-owner bowed as Dobbs rose to depart. The mill-owner honoured his visitor by opening the door himself for the lawyer. The mill-owner and aristocrat shook hands a second time with the lawyer, and stood on the steps bare-headed as Mr. Dobbs ascended into the garden and finally disappeared.

“Truly a remarkable man,” said Mr.

William Rutland Hardwick, closing the door.

“The old fool!” muttered Dobbs, as he shuffled through the iron gates into Lordsmill Street, where he encountered many people returning from their tramp with the soldiers.

Susan Hardwick, sitting near her bedroom window, looking in the direction of the London road, heard the people returning homewards, the sounds of their clattering feet being increased by the noise of some who wore wooden shoes, the clogs of the north answering to the French sabots.

Though the martial music was by this time awakening the enthusiasm of slumbering villages miles away, she fancied she still heard it, and she nursed the idea, in a dreamy sort of way, but with a sense of

depression rather than of grief, a feeling of humiliation and disappointment. The first shock of sorrow over, she was conscious of a feeling of mortification. Her pride and her wilfulness came to the relief of her sentiment of pity for Oliver North, and her love for him. She was angry with herself at one moment for confessing her love; the next she felt hurt at North leaving her when she had laid bare her heart to him. She never felt until now how much she wanted the advice of a mother or a sincere friend. Not that her mother would have helped her much had she been alive. She was but a poor creature, with one idea in her head, and that was full of her husband, whom she obeyed implicitly in thought and deed, and of whose family and ancestors she had a superstitious admiration.

The mill-owner's only daughter looked

out upon those tall elms that were shedding their leaves, and saw in the picture a likeness to herself. Somehow it seemed as if her hopes were falling in showers around her, and that she would be left a wreck for the cruel winds of Fate to blow upon. A sense of utter loneliness took possession of her; and with it a feeling of it-doesn't-matter, an impatience of misfortune, a certain recklessness of thought that challenged the better instincts of her nature. She was one of those intellectual, impulsive women who need the good influence of a wise, loving mother, the example of a strong, manly, honourable father; or, what is still better, the affectionate guidance of a clever, big-hearted husband. She thought philosophically, and felt like a woman; in mind, she looked upon men as inferior to women. In her heart she loved a man passionately, but

she would have gone on loving him without disclosing her secret, if circumstances had not placed her in a situation in which her heart had got the better of her head. Hers was a nature full of contradictions. It was most admirable when under the influence of her heart; but she was continually agitated with struggles between her strong common sense and her sentiment of affection; between her superstitious idea of duty and her desire to love and be loved; between her pride of birth and her pride of personal power; between her love of pretty dresses and her love of independence; and on this morning, worn with the most agitating incident of her life, angry with herself, disappointed at waking up and finding Oliver North gone, after her startling display of humility; irritated at old Nannie Dawson's familiarity; and increasingly conscious of her father's in-

debtedness to Lord Ellerbie, she was stricken with a sense of bewilderment that bordered on despair.

“I will go and see Mary Kirk,” she said, by-and-by.

When she expressed that intention to her father, Mr. Hardwick promptly agreed with her wish, making a mental determination that, while she was in the neighbourhood of Brackenbury Towers, he would call upon her with Lord Ellerbie, and make her pay a visit to that historic place.

In the meantime, Mr. Septimus Dobbs, reclining upon his leather chair in his private office, in the midst of his papers and parchments, like a spider in the middle of his web, waiting for victims, decided, like the human spider he was, that he must spin a connecting link between Chesterfield and London. His plans had extend-

ed lately, and his web must be enlarged accordingly.

It was not necessary that he should walk out of the town and let the coach overtake him at Hasland. They knew at the Angel he had booked a seat by the mail. It is true, he said it was for one of Lord Ellerbie's guests; but he was crooked and mysterious by nature. He sometimes even cheated himself, pretending that he was going to do one thing, and ending in quite an opposite course. It was as if that proverb of his, "Don't criminate yourself," had been ground into his constitution. "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth," was a text which he chuckled over. In some situation of legal dishonesty, he would put his left hand into his pocket, and sign a document with a grin of pretended secrecy, backing his right hand against his left at

two to one, as if they were horses running a race. Nobody knew in Chesterfield that he had a correspondent in London who conducted betting transactions for him. Nobody quite knew why they disliked him, though Oliver North, who had once, out of curiosity, been to hear him preach, said irreverently, to the person who had taken him to chapel, that the lawyer impressed the congregation so fearfully with his picture of the horrors of the lower regions because he was so much like old Nick himself that you might have fancied him suddenly developing wings and a tail, belching forth fire, seizing half a dozen of his congregation, and disappearing with them through the window.

“Hi, there! stop!” shouted a voice in the darkness of the highway beyond Hasland, as the flashing lights of the mail-coach for London fell upon the white road.

“All right, Jack,” said the guard, in a re-assuring tone to the driver, “it’s our insider from Chesterfield.”

The lights stood still for a minute, the horses champed their bits, the door was opened, and inside crept the human spider, to spin a treacherous thread between that complicated web in the shadow of the crooked steeple and the great mysterious city of London.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



3 0112 046431893